TRANSITION FROM EMPLOYMENT TO COLLEGE: PERSPECTIVES OF

AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LATINX WOMEN

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by
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TRANSITION FROM EMPLOYMENT TO COLLEGE: PERSPECTIVES OF

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ABSTRACT

Student enrollment data show an increase in the number of women returning to college after employment. Adult women returning to college are more likely to juggle other roles, including mother, spouse, caregiver, and community member while attending college. Higher education administrators have insufficient knowledge about what efforts are necessary to support these women once they return. This qualitative, post-intentional study sought to understand the lived experiences and the essential structure in the meaning of attending college for African American and Latinx women who return to college after working in or outside the home for multiple years. The details of the participants' experiences were analyzed through the post-intentional process of post-reflexion. This process allowed time to review interview notes, videos, participant journals, and personal observations to better explore how prior knowledge, assumptions, and beliefs impacted how African American and Latinx women experienced becoming and being college students. This study acknowledged the gap in the literature about the experiences of African American and Latinx women and added the voices of three African American and three Latinx women. Finding revealed saliency regarding (a) how participants' experiences were fluid and continually constructed; (b) what experiences were cultured, gendered, and socially classed; and (c) what decisions participants made

toward embracing the college community. The results of this study may be used to

expand the way colleges and universities welcome African American and Latinx women

and assist these women in their success.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Education, have examined a dissertation titled "Transition from Employment to College: Perspectives of African American and Latinx Women" presented by David Lesley Greene, candidate for the Doctor of Education degree, and certify that, in their opinion, is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As part of a course project, I had the opportunity to converse with a group of female students about their experiences as college students. All the students were over the age of 25 and made the decision to attend college after starting a family or career. I was intrigued by the way they told their stories. As I listened, I found that they described themselves as women, mothers, wives, partners, and, for some, daughters and grandparents. Their identities influenced their experiences and how they spoke about being intelligent, determined, organized, and caring. They felt that their lived experiences helped them understand how they learned, framed their perceptions of their decisions, and guided their future choices. When speaking of becoming and being students, they talked in detail about their relationships with other students and some faculty members. Lacking in the conversation were details about how the institution assisted them in their transitions to college.

For many students, the transition to college life can be difficult as issues associated with changes in their homes, families, and friends can be daunting. The transition process can be even more overwhelming for first-generation students who tend to work longer hours and have more significant family responsibilities than their non-first-generation peers (Barry et al., 2009). The challenge of becoming and being a student is further complicated for an adult learner; specifically, a woman who is the head of her household and has commitments to family and work. Ross-Gordan (2011) noted that one critical difference between adults entering college and their traditionally aged peers "is the high likelihood that they are juggling other life roles while attending school, including those of worker, spouse or partner, parent, caregiver, and community member" (p. 26). For women adult learners who are heads

of households and first-generation college students, obtaining an education may be a secondary pursuit, thereby putting the students at risk of leaving college and creating barriers to degree completion.

Key to the current research is the essential characteristics of female adult learners aged 25 and older and the impact of these women on the higher education system. As a group, these adult learners have been a growing population on college and university campuses for decades. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the number of students aged 25 to 34 enrolled in postsecondary degree-granting colleges and universities increased by 41% between 1999 and 2013. The number of students age 35 and older increased by 25% during that same period. This same population of students ages 25 to 34 is expected to grow 17% between 2013 and 2024; and the number of students aged 35 and older is expected to increase by 10% during that same period (Hussar & Bailey, 2016). Additionally, Hussar and Bailey assert that the enrollment of female students aged 25 and older increased by 38% between 1999 and 2013 and is expected to increase an additional 16% by 2024.

There is an additional disparity between the success rates of White female students and that of their African American and Latinx cohorts within the female student population. According to the Digest of Education Statistics (2020), the graduation rate of all first-time, full-time female students is 63%. The White female student graduation rate for this population sits above the national average at 66.9%. In comparison, the graduation rate of first-time, full-time African American female students is significantly lower at 43.9%. The graduation rate of Latinx female students is 58.2%, which is higher than that of African American female students but is considerably lower than their White first-time, full-time

female counterparts. At public two-year colleges, the graduation rates include information on students who transfer to four-year institutions, and they reflect disparities within the female student population. The overall female graduation rates at public two-year colleges are 29.2%. The graduate rate of White female students is 32.7%, while that of their African American and Latinx female cohort is 18.7% and 27.0%, respectively (Digest of Education Statistics, 2020).

Problem Statement

While the student enrollment data show an increase in the numbers of women returning to college after employment, higher education administrators have insufficient knowledge about what efforts are necessary to support African American and Latinx women returning from employment to college. These women need assistance as they embark on their educational endeavors. As women return to college, they take with them additional responsibilities that are not tied directly to their learning (Jacobs & King, 2002; St. Rose & Hill, 2013), which has the potential to impact their abilities to succeed. In 1998, NCES stated that many first-generation students were older, from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, and female. First-generation college Latinas are often employed more than part-time (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). As previously discussed, this trend of older women who return to college is projected to continue (Hussar & Bailey, 2016).

As the faces of first-generation students change, it becomes clear that women are among the growing ranks of these students. Many of these nontraditional-aged female students have families, work full- or part-time, are changing careers, or are financially struggling and yet pursue higher education, especially at community colleges (Johnston, 2010; Kasworm, 2003; Kasworm, 2012; Spellman, 2007; St. Rose & Hill, 2013; White,

2001). The need, not necessarily the desire, to be many things, such as a mother, caregiver, spouse, and student, at once has the potential to create a cascade of barriers that may impede the success of these women. The experiences of first-generation students were highlighted by Barry et al. (2009), who showed that barriers to college completion and student success developed when education becomes a secondary pursuit. Specifically, women moving from employment to college are at a higher risk of not completing their degrees.

The site for the current research, Mid-Atlantic Community College (pseudonym) (MACC), is an urban serving community college. MACC has more than 32,000 students taking credit and non-credit courses. Forty percent of MACC's student population is age 25 and over, and 64% of the student population is women. Additionally, 73% of students receive financial aid. Twenty-three percent of the White student populations at MACC graduate with a certificate or degree compared to 10% of African American students and 15% of Latinx students. Data provided by MACC note that, while there has been an overall increase in the number of first-time students who persist from fall to fall, the persistence rates of female students, regardless of age, remained relatively flat from fall 2014 through fall 2017 with a slight increase from fall 2017 to fall 2018. As noted in Table 1, the percentage of all first-time students at MACC shows steady and consistent growth from fall 2014 through fall 2018.

Table 1

Fall to Fall Persistence Rates for MACC All Students

Student Population	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
All Female	50.27%	50.04%	49.79%	53.09%
All Male	44.08%	47.75%	43.32%	47.13%
All Students	47.54%	49.03%	47.00%	50.60%

When the data were disaggregated to only include students aged 25 and older, as noted in Table 2, the persistence of female students in this group remained flat between fall 2014 and fall 2017 and showed a slight drop between fall 2017 and fall 2018. The persistence rate for the male student population, aged 25 and older, showed a significant increase between fall 2014 and fall 2016 and a flattening of this same male student population between fall 2016 and fall 2018. It is important to note here that MACC has made a concerted effort to increase the success rates of male students, which showed a positive impact, but there is no evidence that the success rates of female students have been a priority. The goal here is not to condemn MACC for not providing the same level of structured support for women that it currently does for men; instead, it is an opportunity to expand our knowledge of how institutions of higher education can better support nontraditional-aged female students as they transition to being college students.

Table 2

Fall to Fall Persistence Rates for MACC Students Aged 25 and Older

Student Population	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Female 25+	52.93%	52.92%	51.50%	47.90%
Male 25+	37.61%	47.96%	42.60/%	42.60%
All Students	47.54%	49.03%	47.00%	50.60%

To better understand the experiences of women in community colleges, St. Rose and Hill (2013) examined community college literature, conducted interviews with community college leaders, reviewed program materials, and collected data from two federal sources (i.e., Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems and the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study). Their findings show that more than a million student mothers are responsible for taking care of their families while balancing school and work. "Mothers juggle child care and other family responsibilities along with work and school, and the

competing demands on their time and money make it difficult for them to complete a certificate or degree or transfer to a four-year college or university" (St. Rose & Hill, 2013, p. 25). St. Rose and Hill also pointed out that first-generation college students and older college students may be unfamiliar with campus cultures and available resources. Therefore, they may not understand the how, when, and why of successful transitions to college.

Successful transition from employment to college may have the additional complication of aspects of a student's socioeconomic status. St. Rose and Hill (2013) noted that, in 2010, 57% of students at community colleges were women and that 57% represented more than four million women who actively sought degrees, certificates, or transfer opportunities. Yet, the challenges facing students of poverty who are also parents may affect their persistence and the opportunities available in nontraditional career fields (Alfred & Nanton, 2009; Barry et al., 2009). According to St. Rose and Hill (2013), "women often have limited experience in and awareness of [STEM] fields, they may be held back by external and internalized social stereotypes, and they may lack support to enter and persevere in these fields" (p. 43).

College leaders and administrators must decide if the matriculation and graduation rates of these women are priorities. If so, what resources are needed to support the transitions of first-generation nontraditional-aged female students to the college environment? Like other first-generation college students, these first-generation nontraditional-aged female students often lack the historical experiences of their non-first-generation peers (Barry et al., 2009). As they reviewed the female student population, Alfred and Nanton (2009) noted that women in college are present in large numbers among the poor and working-class groups in society and may experience reduced access to a variety of resources, including educational

resources. In essence, women who are first-generation students from low-SES backgrounds often have multiple characteristics that can lead to tendencies to stop-out (i.e., leave for one or more semesters, consecutive or nonconsecutive) or drop out of college, often for non-academic reasons. Wolf (2009), understanding the multiple roles that these nontraditional female students experience, noted that women in transition to college are like a "rocking ship… constantly in motion" (p. 57). The multiple identities of these women underpin the impact of this problem and should not remain unaddressed.

The body of work concerning first-generation female adult learners is limited; however, research by Próspero and Vohra-Gupta (2007), which focused on more traditional-age students, helps to highlight the impact of the need to maintain multiple roles while also being a student. They conducted bivariate and multivariate statistical analyses of 277 ethnically and racially diverse first-generation and non-first-generation student participants at a community college. The sample, for the first-generation students, was almost evenly divided regarding employment, with 35% working full-time, 29% working part-time, and 36% not working. Thirty-three percent of the non-first-generation participants worked full-time, 39% worked part-time, and 28% were not working. The percentage of first-generation female students was higher than that of female non-first-generation students (i.e., 70% and 54%, respectively). On average, the first-generation students were slightly younger than the non-first-generation students (i.e., 22 and 23, respectively). The researchers conducted two correlational analyses to investigate the association between the participants' college motivations and integration variables, looking separately at first-generation and non-first-generation students. Two multiple regressions were also conducted to examine the predictive value of the motivation and integration dimensions on the academic achievements among the

first-generation and non-first-generation students. The researchers found that the motivation and integration dimensions for the first-generation students were significantly related to each other, except for academic integration with social integration. They noted that, among first-generation students, the:

> strongest correlations were intrinsic motivation with extrinsic motivation (r ¼ .557, p < .01); academic integration (r ¼ .446, p < .001) and social integration (r ¼ .337, p < .001); as well as academic integration with amotivation [used to described individuals who perceived their behaviors as being caused by forces out of their control and do not understand the connections between their desired outcomes and their behaviors] (r ¼ .345, p < .001) and extrinsic motivation (r ¼ 497, p < .001). (Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007, p. 970)

Like Próspero and Vohra-Gupta et al. (2007), Ramos-Sánchez and Nichols (2007) (2007) noted that the difficulties related to transition, specifically for first-generation students, make this population of students vulnerable to lower academic performances and can impede their adjustments to college.

Along with understanding the experiences and expectations of first-generation students, there is a need for understanding how social capital, whether real or perceived, impacts the transition of nontraditional-aged female students to college. Social capital theory is useful in understanding the experiences of working-class, first-generation college students (Moschetti & Hudley, 2008). Social capital consists of many factors, including networks of relationships that aid students by providing them with information, guidance, and emotional support. Social capital is further impacted by other types of capital, including cultural capital.

Research has shown that the educational achievements of individuals are related to the various types of capital that individuals possess, including social, economic, and cultural capital (Coleman, 1988; Eng, 2009; Rogošic & Baranovic, 2016; Sullivan, 2001). The cultural capital theory suggests that people of a given social status replicate their social

standings' cultural values and knowledge (Bourdieu, 1977). How someone interacts with and in a space can be understood through how social and cultural capital are intertwined. Bourdieu (1977) understood that a person could be in a space without inhabiting that space properly and that habitus, through social uses, makes the habitat. College leaders who want first-generation nontraditional aged female students to succeed must understand students' perceived sense of their social and cultural capital. These leaders must then work to understand how their institutions can assist these students in claiming these types of capital to help determine their potential for college success.

Sandoval-Lucero et al. (2014) conducted qualitative research using a literature review as well as focus groups and field notes for 22 African American and Latinx female students from two campuses located in a diverse suburban community in southwestern United States. The researchers used four procedures: (a) triangulation, (b) rich and thick descriptions, (c) purposeful sampling, and (d) detailed descriptions of the participants to determine patterns of success among the students. Sandoval-Lucero et al. (2014) found that student success was directly related to the students' relationships with faculty, family support, and campus engagement and support, which are all forms of social capital. They also noted that students' relationships with faculty, specifically for female students, allowed the students to focus on school.

These results show that students without a developed sense of social capital may lack the skills or access to the skills that could support their successes. Wolf (2009) noted that, for women to build social capital, they need to grow their family and friendship networks along with mentors in academia and, when possible, workplace settings. As such, college leaders

must be prepared to assist first-generation, nontraditional-aged female students as they gain a better understanding and acquisition of social capital.

St. Rose and Hill (2013) noted that an increase in outreach to women through better advising services and more supportive environments could increase their participation and success in more rigorous fields of study. Targeted outreach may, in turn, increase women's academic engagement. First-generation nontraditional-aged female students who experience differences in and levels of academic engagement and persistence are further impacted by the quality and quantity of social networks and social capital (Moschetti & Hudley, 2008). A sense of social capital among low-SES students can impact their successful transitions from employment to college life (Francis & Miller, 2008). To better understand the transitions of women who are heads of households from employment to college, I viewed their transitions as phenomena and used the narratives of women within this population of students as the methods by which to understand their experiences, an aspect of the research that is missing in the field of education.

A challenge when examining the existing research on students from low-SES backgrounds was that the majority focuses on traditional students ages 18 to 24 (Aronson, 2008; Attinasi, 1989; Barry et al., 2009; Bennett & Okinaka, 1990; Bonet & Walters, 2016). Additionally, much of the research was focused on men, specifically the gaps in success for men of color (Antonio, 2004; Wood & Palmer, 2015). However, Miller et al. (2011) conducted a mixed-method research study that explored the challenges facing student parents, with a primary focus on the supply of and demand for childcare supports provided by postsecondary institutions. The researchers used literature reviews, interviews of childcare experts and program directors, data from the National Coalition for Campus Children's

Centers Member Survey, and surveys of campus childcare centers. Miller et al. found that of the four million women who attend community colleges, one million are mothers, and half that number are unmarried. Miller et al. pointed out that for student parents, especially low-SES single parents, to succeed in postsecondary education, high-quality, affordable childcare is essential. They noted that many campuses fail to provide support to student parents, and often those who did provide childcare did so through underfunded and insufficient programs for the existing need. Additionally, they noted that an increase in access to free or low-cost childcare could have a positive impact on enrollment, matriculation, and degree completion. Many first-generation, nontraditional female and low-SES learners may put off college due to the inability to pay for childcare and responsibilities to families. In addition, these students often lack an understanding of the financial aid process and the educational tools that they need to succeed.

Walpole (2007) asserted that low-SES students are more likely than high-SES students to lack access to rigorous pre-college coursework and may be tracked away from honors and advanced placement courses. Low-SES adult learners, with various levels of preparedness for college, when they graduate high school, may now, after years away from a structured learning environment, be even less prepared for higher education. Furthermore, adult students who view themselves as novice learners in the environment of the college classroom might not be prepared for the commitment needed to succeed (Kasworm, 2008, p. 31). Academic preparedness is a crucial component to a successful transition to college. Low-SES women, specifically historically underprepared first-generation students, often do not have the historical family experiences to help them successfully transition to the new learning environment. Colleges and universities that want to increase the matriculation and

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graduation rates of these women must be prepared to provide the levels of support that these women need.

St. Rose and Hill (2013) stated that support services that meet women's needs as both mothers and students are vital to increasing the successes of women who are heads of households. Factors such as high-quality childcare and an increase in opportunities that inform women of nontraditional fields that can impact their economic futures are paramount to the success of these women. The research sought to learn how women who are heads of households and first-generation express their experiences transitioning from employment to college. According to Moschetti and Hudley (2008), entry into college can be a stressful transition that involves social, emotional, and academic adjustments and is made more difficult for students from high poverty backgrounds and/or those students who are first in their families to attend college. These students, regardless of race and ethnicity, often lack many of the necessary resources needed to transition successfully to college. Hand and Payne (2008) stated that "examples of the struggles of first-generation students can be found in all classes of society but are most often found in low-SES groups and [non-White students]" (p. 4). Higher education administrators must prepare themselves to support first-generation nontraditional female students and their academic pursuits.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of how African American and Latinx women who are low-SES and first-generation students experience the transition from employment to college. For the current study, employment was defined as work in or outside of the home. The most comprehensive means of understanding the transitions of women from employment to college was through a phenomenological study that included

interviews, narratives in the form of participant journals, and personal observations of African American and Latinx female students who had completed at least one semester of college.

Post-intentional phenomenology was used to guide my study. As opposed to the exploration of theories that frame and act as lenses for a study, post-intentional phenomenologists refer to the theoretical framework as a description of "theories I want to think with" (Vagle, 2018, p. 142). This way of embracing theory allowed me to remain open to other theories that emerge throughout the research process (Vagle, 2018). For the current research, the phenomenon was expressed as transition and defined as the complex process of becoming a first-time freshman at an accredited college or university. Patton (2015) described the nature of the type of interviews for a phenomenological study, noting that "phenomenological interviewing…aims to elicit a personal description of a lived experience to describe a phenomenon as much as possible in concrete and lived-through terms" (p. 423). Patton emphasized that the use of documents, such as journals, can be an important aspect of qualitative research and aid in the telling of stories through the narrative tradition, which entails exploring complex experiences, in this instance, stories of transitioning from employment to college (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Observations are significant because they bring the reader into the setting observed through depth and detail; observations are the eyes, ears, and senses for the reader (Patton, 2015).

Research Questions

Research questions are used to guide the process and connect similar lived experiences. Maxwell (2013) stated that "research questions are an important part of a

research study; the research questions guide and link all parts of the study to each other" (p. 65). By listening and gathering students' perspectives of their experiences, this research study explored two central questions and their corresponding sub-questions.

Central Question One: What is the lived experience of transitioning from employment to college for African American and Latinx women who are low-SES and first-generation students?

- What motivates them to become college students after years of employment?
- How do they articulate their experiences related to transitioning to college?

Central Question Two: What is the essential structure in the meaning of attending college for African American and Latinx women who are low-SES and first-generation students?

- What are some of the experiences they identify as being significant during the first semester of college?
- What does college success mean to them after their first semester of enrollment?

While the research questions serve to guide the direction of the study and specify the choice of methods, the theoretical framework is the background knowledge: including theories, concepts, and empirical literature of the study. The framework also includes the experiences of the researcher and aids the interpretation of findings.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework, synonymous with a conceptual framework, is an overview of the assumptions, concepts, beliefs, expectations, and theories that will support a study (Maxwell, 2013). The conceptual framework can be defined as a systemic way of ordering a phenomenon and the expected relationship between the variables (Bickman & Rog, 2009; Warmbrod, 1986). Through the theoretical framework process, I explored the experiences of

adult learners who have not had the historical experiences of their peers and, as such, had a limited understanding of the processes for successful transitions from employment to college.

I brought to this study the assumption that viewing the transition from employment to college as the primary phenomenon, through the lens of women who are low-SES and first-generation students, would bring about a better understanding of the significance of college success, social capital, and college departure. In other words, through the first-person accounts of female students, a fuller voice can be given to the complex process of transition. The following three theories are included in Chapter 2: Theory Review: (a) social and cultural capital theory, (b) student development theory, and (c) transition theory. I believe that these theories helped frame the intersections of identity and the need for institutional support for women who were in the process of becoming and being students. Crenshaw (1991) stated that intersectionality is "useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identities and the ongoing necessity of group politics" (p. 1296), and few things are more political than the power and success of women. The value of the voices of these women begins with an understanding of social capital and cultural capital.

Social Capital and Cultural Capital

Capital is the power someone exhibits or gains as they walk through the world; this power is assumed, given, or gained. As a theory, social capital is grounded in work by Bourdieu (1977), who found that people reproduce what they have experienced; and through the cultivation of relationships, people build and develop capital over time (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1987). This cultivation process allows individuals to gain access to information and spaces (Lin, 2001). Understanding how women experienced and spent their social capital in a college setting helped to show how perceptions of social capital assisted women in their

transitions to college. The impact of social and cultural capital is reflected in research by O'Shea (2015).

O'Shea (2015) conducted and coded in-depth interviews to understand how students' lived experiences across a spectrum of their identities and forms of social capital helped create cultural wealth. O'Shea included six forms of capital in her research (i.e., aspirational, familial, resistant, linguistic, navigational, social) and highlighted three types presented in her findings: aspirational, resistant, and familial. She defined aspirational capital as "form of resilience, which allows both the individual and their children to 'dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals'" (p.71). O'Shea found that older learners, particularly women, used aspirational capital to describe their reasons for attending higher education.

Older female students may form resistant capital to hold onto identities while working to transition or exist in a different space or place. O'Shea noted that resistant capital is referred to as knowledge and skills that have developed due to resistance to subordination, the specific focus of value placed on community capital that has been gained, specifically in how people of color resist racist messages and subordination. This resistance to the status quo in older female participants has also been shown to be related to gender roles and their focus on the self.

According to O'Shea (2015), familial capital focuses on the positive impact that families have on the first person in the family to attend college. Previous studies have focused on the negative impact that families can have when they do not understand the experience of attending a university. O'Shea noted that older students, both female and male, spoke directly to the positive impact that familial capital has on students' experiences. Her

research, while not specifically focused on the experiences of women, ties directly to the current research and highlights how women use their capital as students.

Student Development

Student development theory, created in 1969 by Chickering and updated in 1993 by Chickering and Reisser (1993), suggests that students have seven non-linear vectors of development or tasks that they must go through. These vectors can be viewed independently or in connection with one another. Chickering and Reisser showed that movement along these vectors could occur at different rates, and vectors did not occur in silos but could interact with movement along with other vectors. For example, in the first vector, *developing competence*, Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted that interpersonal competence requires the skills of listening, cooperating, and communicating effectively, along with the sophisticated ability to tune in to another person and respond appropriately. This process may align to personal agendas of groups' goals, which helps relationships flourish and or groups to function. A sense of belonging and the process of transitioning from one identity, pre-college, to a new status, that of a college student, is necessary for a student's success.

To understand how students' sense of belonging and how friendship quality influences students' transitions to college, Pitman and Richmond (2008) conducted surveys at two points during students' first year in college. Using the variables of scholastic competence, social acceptance, self-worth, internalizing problem behaviors, and externalizing problem behaviors, they completed a correlations analysis to understand the bivariate associations among the variables. Additionally, they completed a regression analysis in the form of an ordinary least square regression of the dependent variables and a residual change model to measure the students' adjustments over time. Pitman and Richmond

(2008) found that students' sense of university belonging was linked to their positive self-perceptions of social acceptance and academic competencies. The current research study further explored this idea, specifically as it applied to women, by inquiring about their sense of belonging during their transitions to college and the impact that the sense of belonging had on their propensities to succeed.

Transition Theory

Schlossberg's 1981 transition theory was designed as a tool by which to better understand how adults process transitions and move through changes. Schlossberg et al. (1995) defined transition as "any event, or nonevent, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles…that involves changes as well as losses" (pp. 27-28). An event can include marriage, divorce, having children, and, for the current research, attending college. Evans et al. (2010) suggested that Schlossberg's theory can be used as a framework by which to facilitate an understanding of adults in transition and aid them in connecting to the help they need to cope. While the current research was not designed to lead people to help, the intention was to focus on the transition itself. The focus included how women perceived this process and the potential tools that adult learners needed to move toward success.

The current research defined transition as an event or phenomenon and specifically focused on the transitions of women who are heads of households as they moved from employment in- or outside the home to college. Research by Barry et al. (2009) showed a clear connection between Schlossberg's transition and Chickering's student development theories. Barry et al. (2009) established that the transition to college could be characterized as a stressful life event due to the variety of life changes that typically occur at the same time.

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The work by Barry and his colleagues helped to supply the language around college transition as a process or phenomenon and assisted a way to bridge the current research to Schlossberg's and Chickering's theories. To be more specific about transition as it applied to the current work, focus existed on the population of women students who were low-SES and first-generation adult learners, all of which are defined in the definition section.

The aforementioned theories are further explored in chapter 2 with the literature review outlined in Chapter 3 to include a discussion related to politics of gender, the experiences of women in college, and the success of women. These theories, along with the literature review are contributed to the meaning of the experiences of African American and Latinx females as they entered college after years of employment. A post-intentional phenomenology approach was used to explore their experiences.

Methodology Overview

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the methodology used for this study. Additionally, this section will briefly introduce the post-intentional phenomenology and narrative traditions as they apply to the study, followed by a summary of the data collection and analysis procedures. There are several forms of phenomenology including, Transcendental, Existential, Hermeneutical, and Linguistical (Richards & Morse, 2007). I conducted a post-intentional phenomenological study informed by narrative inquiry. These methods are more thoroughly examined in Chapter 4: Methodology. The methodology of the current research also informs readers of the sequential development of the study, which led to an understanding of students' transitions as phenomena examined via the narratives of their personal experiences.

Qualitative research was chosen as the framework for this study because it allowed for the exploration of student transition as a phenomenon through the narrative of personal experience. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that qualitative research is conducted because of the need to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue. Grbich (2013) stated that qualitative research:

> Provides detailed information and can progress knowledge in a variety of areas: it can help assess the impact of policies on a population; it can give insight into people's individual experiences; it can help evaluate service provision; and it can enable. (p. 3)

In the current research, the setting was a college campus, and the units of analyses common to all participants are their personal experiences as women who transitioned from employment to college. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is used "because of a need to study a group or population, identify variables that can then be measured, or hear silenced voices" (p. 40). It was the desire to hear silenced voices that qualitative research was chosen as the means by which to examine this particular transition.

Phenomenology is a tradition within qualitative research and has been identified as the most relevant method by which to examine the phenomenon of student transition. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology is concerned with discovering the meanings and essences of knowledge. Specifically, a phenomenological study allowed for the examination of student's transition from employment to college as the phenomenon. Groenewald (2004) stated that "the aim of phenomenology is the return to the concrete, captured by the slogan 'Back to the things themselves'" (p. 4). The participant needed to acknowledge the transition itself as the subject that needed to be examined. It is within these parameters of phenomenology that the research was focused on through the lens of narrative inquiry.

Personal journals were an essential aspect of the current research and were a form of narrative inquiry. Patton (2015) noted that "personal narratives, family stories, suicide notes, graffiti, literary nonfiction, and life histories reveal cultural and social patterns through the lens of individuals' experiences" (p. 128). The stories told through journaling enhanced the understanding of transition, personal identity, and social capital. Narrative inquiry was not the primary means of understanding the transitions of these female students but, coupled with post-intentional phenomenology, added validity to the research process through multiple forms of data.

Data Collection Overview

The data collection for the current research included interviews, personal reflections in the form of participant journals, and multiple observations of interviews to confirm the meaning of what I saw in the interviews and read in three iterations of journals. The participants for this study consisted of women who were first-generation college students from low-SES backgrounds at an urban-serving institution. Additionally, the participants had other traits, such as being from traditionally marginalized communities. All the students completed at least their first semester at the selected institutions and were identified by their access to the maximum amount of available Pell grant funds through financial aid.

According to Clandinin and Huber (2012) and Patton (2015), interviews allow researchers to get to the core essence of a phenomenon. Therefore, I conducted virtual face-to-face interviews in an open-ended question format. Through the interview process, I was mindful of the need to be a good listener (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews were relatively unstructured, with probing questions when necessary. It was my goal that, through the interview process, for the voices of the women to lead to a better understanding of their

transitions as they were perceived from the views of the students who may be considered at-risk of not matriculating or graduating in accordance with the traits defined earlier. I used personal observations during and after the interviews to identify the participant's mood and expressions as well as the context of the interview itself (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). Additionally, as Miles et al. (2013) suggested, the personal observations were used to identify the effects of the interviews on me as the researcher and included information about personal biases, which could have occurred during the interview process.

To get clearer narratives, I asked each participant to complete three journals as part of the research process. Narratives, in the form of journals, allowed me to gain additional information that could have been missed through the interview process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These personal reflection journals helped me identify additional themes that were not present themselves through the interview process. Follow-up interviews were considered but not needed in the event the personal reflections identified significant themes not identified during the first interviews. Observations of video interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of the context and environment of the interview; how six women expressed their experiences, body language, and instances of reflections. These moments allowed me to place the post-reflexions of post-intentional phenomenology into the meaning of the phenomenon of transition for these women.

Data Analysis

Post-intentional phenomenology was the major data analysis approach used for the interviews, with narrative analysis applied to participants' reflective journals. Post-intentional phenomenology consists of non-sequential steps that the researcher reviews to understand the manifestations that intentionally connect the phenomenon and the object: (1)

identifying a phenomenon around a social issue, (2) devise a clear process for investigation, (3) post-reflexion plan, (4) explorations of the post-intentional phenomenon, and (5) craft text that engages the phenomenon in context (Soule & Freeman, 2019; Vagle, 2018). Narrative analysis, which incorporated a three-dimensional approach, aided in the analysis of participants' reflective journals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Making meaning of data in post-intentional phenomenology requires deconstructing the wholes, accomplished through the philosophical idea known as lines of flight and two forms of noticing, detailed in the methods section. Vagle encouraged me to take stock of how my body and emotions, responded to questions about what seemed to fit, what did not fit, and what might be learned about the phenomenon that is not yet thinkable. The tentative manifestations that intentionally connect the phenomenon, the subject, and the object, within the lived experience are key to post-intentional phenomenology.

Vagle (2018) noted that in French, both flight and escape could be translated as *fuite*, which allows for a different range of meanings than either of the English terms. *Fuite* covers the act of fleeing or eluding and also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance. There was no relation to flying when I use the phrase lines of flight.

My use of *lines of flight* in relation to post-intentionality was conceived using the range of meanings the French term allows. That is, it was not my suggestion that flight, conceptually, was about flying but more about how I recognized where stories fled, eluded, flowed, and leaked. When I said things like "take-off," I leaned more towards the fleeing aspect of fuite. But, other times, when I said "lines of flight," I meant the flows and swells (Hofsess, 2013) of participants' stories. Throughout my process, I was committed to noticing the moments where there was a take-off point or where structures of their stories flowed or

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swelled, and I paid closer attention to how such intensities came in and through their experiences.

Chapter 4, as previously mentioned, will provide a more in-depth analysis of the theoretical perspectives and methods I used. My hope was to reveal a more complex understanding of the phenomena associated with transitioning from employment to college revealed in the stories of these women for multiple audiences.

Definition of Terms

Terminology and vocabulary surrounding women, gender, and identity continue to evolve. The terms listed below are meant to assist the readers in understanding the intent and usage of specific terminology for the current research**.**

Hispanic, Latina/o, Latinx. The term Hispanic was adopted by the U.S. government during the Nixon administration and was implemented in the U.S. Census in 1980 (Salinas and Lozano, 2017). Hispanic is derived from the Latin word Hispania, which became the word for España (Spain). Ultimately, Hispanic refers to people who are from countries where the primary language is Spanish (Salinas and Lozano, 2017). According to Salinas and Lozano, the term Latina/o was adopted by the U.S. government as a way to label individuals who identified as mestizo or mulato, meaning they were mixed with White, with Black, and the Native people of Central or South America and Spanish speaking areas of the Caribbean. Salinas and Lozano when on to say the origins of the term Latinx are not fully evident. They say Latinx emerged around 2004 as the queer community searched for ways to be more inclusive and go beyond the gender binary of male/female.

Chicana/o. According to the Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE), the term Chicana/o the term Chicano signifies the history and legacy of a period

of racism, discrimination, and segregation in the U.S. TACHE noted that the time required a civil rights movement by Mexican Americans and others that included litigation, political activism, scholarship, and other forms of resistance. Chicano was used in the early 20th century and was originally used to describe people who descended from Mexico. Chicano became a negative term and was later reclaimed during the Chicano Movement of the 1960s.

The Feminine Mystique. I only mention *The Feminine Mystique*, written by Betty Friedan in 1963, because it was credited as having influenced the second wave of feminism. In the book, Friedan explored the idea of the ideal role of women as afforded by society and how women saw themselves through the lens of feminine mystique. Napikoski (2020) noted that the feminine mystique is the false notion of what a woman's role is in society – to be a wife, a mother, a housewife, and nothing else. The feminine mystique, according to Napikoski, is an artificial idea of femininity and that the role of women should not include a career of fulfilling one's individual potential. Napikoski noted that within feminine mystic, cleaning house and raising children were the approved role of women as homemakers and nurturers. All other pursuits were masculine in nature and not approved for women. While Friedan's work is credited with its influence on the second wave of feminism, the feminine mystique spoke more specifically to the lived experiences of middle- and upper-class White women and did not explore the experience of poor White women or women of color, which was considered it flaw by Black and Latinx women of the time.

Womanism/Womanish. The concept and construct of womanism are complex. Walker (1983) noted four aspects of womanish (a) acting and being a black feminist woman who embraces all her power as a woman; (b) intimately loves as she chooses, while being committed to the survival of the wholeness of people and herself; (c) loves regardless; and

(d) a deeper, more expression version of feminism. This broken-down version of Walker's words, which are included in their entirety in Chapter 2, does not give full justice to the complexity in which she speaks to womanish. It does, in my opinion, speak to the heart of our need to understand womanism. Smith (2017) notes womanism needs to be claimed "as a mechanism for truth-telling and uncovering the contradictions that can fester into oozing wounds" (Smith, 2017, p. 77). Smith goes on to note that Walker's words are a reminder to actively and bravely be aware of silencing voices and seeing lived stories as an expression of freedom, viewed through the lens of womanism.

Combahee River Collective. The Combahee River Collective was an important Black feminist group that came into existence in 1974 as the Boston chapter of the National Black Feminist Organization, founded in 1973 (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). The purpose of this collective was to start a political movement to combat racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression against Black women (Breines, 2007). Breines (2007) stated that women of color met regularly through the "Women of Color: Barriers and Bridges" workshops in Boston and discussed the barriers that separate them, including racism, class privilege, educational privilege, color, language, culture, and sexual preference. Breines noted the women brought out the positive links and bridges that exist and that could be used to build networks among women of color. This group of women set the stage for the Black feminist movement.

White. There was a conscientious decision to capitalize the "W" in the term "White" for this dissertation. As can be found throughout the United States, White is used as a racial identity which includes "those who identify with ethnicities and nationalities that can be traced back to Europe" (Thúy Nguyễn & Pendleton, para. 6, 2020). They also noted that not

naming White as a race leaves it neutral and the standard for identity. Thúy Nguyễn and

Pendleton stated:

> We believe that it is important to call attention to White as a race as a way to understand and give voice to how Whiteness functions in our social and political institutions and our communities. Moreover, the detachment of "White" as a proper noun allows White people to sit out of conversations about race and removes accountability from White people's and White institutions' involvement in racism. (para. 7)

The current research, like the work of Thúy Nguyễn and Pendleton, required the

capitalization of "Black" and "White" about racial identity. If leaders and educators of PWIs

are given an academic pass in the engagement of race, then the denormalization of Whiteness

and its functions will remain unchanged.

Significance

The number of women aged 25 and older who are entering colleges continues to grow

at one of the fastest rates nationally (Hussar & Bailey, 2016). The graduation rate of White

women is 52.39% higher rate than the graduation rate of African American women and

14.95% higher than Latinx women (Digest of Education Statistics, 2020). There has been

significant research on the success of Black and Brown men, while the voices of Black

Brown women lack a significant amount of representation in the literature. Without a better

understanding of the experiences of African and Latinx women, college and university

administrators will not be prepared to support this growing population of students. This

phenomenological study adds to the current body of research about the experience of African

American and Latinx women as they transition to colleges or universities. Oldfield (2007)

suggested four reforms that higher education leaders can use to assist first-generation

students from low-SES backgrounds: (a) develop support systems; (b) address classism; (c)

diversify the social-class origins of the faculty; and (d) diversify the social-class origins of

the student body. This research contributes to the literature by adding the voices of African American and Latinx women to discussions about student persistence and success. While the current research does not give voice to all of the suggested reforms, it does add the narratives of these six African American and Latinx women who are low-SES first-generation adult learners to the literature surrounding college students' transitions.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a foundation for this study. The chapter included background and broader context, problem statement, purpose and research questions, theoretical framework, an overview of the methodology, and significance of the study. The issue, in context, is a narrative post-intentional phenomenological study of the transition of women who attend college after more than seven years of employment in- or outside the home. The current study is intended to assist in understanding female students through their voices, explaining their personal experiences. Chapter 2 will provide a review of the theories that helped frame the research. Chapter 3 will include a review of relevant literature related to the politics of gender, giving context to being a woman in poverty, the experiences of women in college, the experience of non-White female students, and the success of African American and Latinx women. In chapter 4, I impart a discussion of methods followed by the findings in Chapter 5. The concluding chapter presents implications of findings, including recommendations, future research, and reflections regarding my research journey to discover the meaning of transition for female women of color.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE STUDY THEORIES

Theories are used to explain the context, understand phenomena, and predict

outcomes based on a body of knowledge. Theory is a part of who we are and the subjects we

research. Theory moves in and through us and our subjects and allows researchers to explore

phenomena and lived experiences (Collins & Stockton, 2018; Goodson, 2010; hooks, 1991;

Zita, 1998). There was a complex relationship between me and the current research topic;

theories allowed me to contemplate that relationship with subjectivity (Bott, 2010). It was

then through reflexivity that I was conscious of my role in the research, the impact the

research had on me, and how my experiences, beliefs, identities, etc., painted the way I saw

the research (Palaganas et al., 2017).

In the current study, theories were used to understand a student's ability to achieve

her academic goals, explain when and where success might occur, and identify what factors

influence success. The theoretical frameworks provided context for these theories and their

place within the research study. This chapter explored four theories related to the success of

women in college: student development theory, social capital, intersectionality, and transition

theory. By gaining an understanding of why different factors influence student persistence

and success, college leaders can develop tools to identify effective strategies for the success

of nontraditional female students whose experiences were the units of analyses of the current

study.

Student Development Theory

Strayhorn (2016) noted that a theory is a lens and that different lenses provided

different interpretations of the same experiences. Viewing student development through

Strayhorn's (2012) theory of belonging lens and Tinto's (1993) theory of attrition lens allows

for two different perspectives of the same experiences. As such, an examination of both

Strayhorn and Tinto's theories offered a broader understanding of students' experiences.

Belonging

A sense of belonging is often framed as a basic human need. In a college setting,

Strayhorn (2019) defined a sense of belonging as:

> …students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of
> connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted,
> respected, valued, and important to the campus community or others on campus such
> as faculty, staff, and peers. (p.4)

Developing a positive sense of belonging is a key indicator of students' potentials to persist

(Christie et al., 2004; Tinto, 2012a; Tinto, 2012b; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Strayhorn

(2016) used the sense of belonging theory to refer to plausible explanations of observed

phenomena and noted that, in higher education, these phenomena occur on college campuses

prior to and during college and have a lasting impact that influences college experiences.

Strayhorn's model of sense of belonging, related to college identity, is comprised of seven

core elements: (a) consists of a basic human need, in that all people desire to belong and find

connections with others; (b) suggests a fundamental motive sufficient to drive human

behavior as individuals are compelled to satisfy their needs to belong – not to assume that

what individuals are compelled to do positively or actively promotes social engagement; (c)

takes on heightened importance based on time, place, and circumstance, wanting the

unfamiliar to become familiar; (d) relates to seemingly a consequence of mattering, a longing

to matter by seeking attention or a need for others; (e) intersects social identity and affects

college students' sense of belonging in areas of race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion

in ways that simultaneously influences that sense of belonging; (f) engenders other positive

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outcomes, when a sense of belonging is achieved it propagates other positive outcomes; and (g) satisfies institutional belonging on a continual basis and likely changes as circumstances, conditions, and contexts change. A full discussion of Strayhorn's theory provides a language for college faculty to understand and discuss how the presence and actions of others influence students' sense of belonging.

At its core, a sense of belonging is a basic human need (Strayhorn, 2016). Strayhorn asserted that all people have a yearning to belong and find acceptance from others. He stated that, as a universal need, a sense of belonging must be satisfied as a condition for other higher-order needs to be met. Intentional focus on a student's sense of belonging will allow faculty to facilitate faculty-student mentoring programs that will lead to better relationship building.

Strayhorn (2016) completed a secondary analysis of data from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) (4th ed.). The original CSEQ consisted of 191 items that measured the quality and quantity of students' involvement in college activities and use of campus facilities. Strayhorn looked specifically at the data from the 2004 CSEQ for Black college students, with additional restrictions for first- and second-year unmarried, full-time students at both two- and four-year institutions. Findings suggested that college satisfaction is related to two types of mentoring relationships that students build with faculty members, personal/professional relationships and research.

Strayhorn's (2007) earlier research related to mentoring relationships involved hierarchical multiple regression analyses between the two types of relationships and found that the linear combination of mentoring measures was significantly related to overall satisfaction with college, $F(2, 538) = 18.74$, $p < .01$ with a .26 sample multiple correlation

coefficient. This coefficient indicated that approximately 7% of the variance in student satisfaction among the sample could be accounted for by the linear combination of the mentoring measures. Strayhorn suggested that research relationships had positive effects on Black college students' satisfaction. This satisfaction, when intentional, can assist students with a positive transition to college.

Attrition and Persistence

While Strayhorn placed much of the responsibility for the sense of belonging on the institution, Tinto suggested that attrition is impacted by a student's own ability to persist. A constant among the research into student persistence is work by Tinto (1975; 1988; 1997), who noted that the first six months of college are essential in determining persistence. The three-stage process that he highlighted was based on earlier research by Van Gennep (1960), showed that, to become a college student, one must (a) separate from what is known, (b) transition to the unknown, and (c) incorporate a new way of being. He argued that how students perceive their abilities to navigate the process of becoming and being a student shapes their attrition.

At the core of Tinto's theory is the idea that two forms of integration must occur for students to persist: academic and social integration. Tinto (1988) suggested that these two forms of integration must occur, in most situations, to ensure persistence. He does, however, make exceptions for those students who may live at home instead of on-campus and those students who attend community colleges. While a consensus may not always exist in regard to how the two integration processes should be applied and if they are both fully applicable within different settings, an agreement does exist that both academic and social integration

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together are better predictors of student persistence and academic success (Tinto, 1997; Deil-Amen, 2011).

As students enter college, an expectation exists that they learn the rules, norms, and expectations of their new environments (Schlossberg et al., 1989). These expectations introduce an interconnected process that is the connective life that pushes and pulls a new student through interpersonal, academic, and organizational relationships (Terenzini et al., 1994). The way a student responds to these pushes and pulls helps to determine if that student's persistence is at risk. This statement is no less true for nontraditionally aged students.

Deil-Amen (2011) noted that, while student persistence theories are most often based on traditional-aged students who attend traditional four-year institutions, Tinto's research leaves room to engage two-year community college students' experiences. Deil-Amen (2011) stated that community colleges, by their sheer nature, change one aspect of Tinto's theory in that the students maintain a sense of home community during their transitions to college. Deil-Amen's research does not mean that Tinto's approach is not applicable, only that an expanded view must be considered when applied to the study of student success at community colleges. While many studies quantify social and academic integration into measurable behaviors and assess their impacts on student success, little is known about the quality and nature of integrative processes, especially how the impact of actions enhance a student's sense of belonging and commitment to persistence at two-year community colleges (Deil-Amen, 2011). One form of integration can act as a vehicle for other forms of integration, with high levels of social integration compensating for weaker academic integration (Deil-Amen)

A multi-method, multi-site study that employed three data sources, utilizing surveys, interviews, and observations, was conducted by Deli-Amen (2012). A total of 238 semi-structured interviews were held with students, staff, and faculty at seven public community colleges and seven private two-year colleges in and near a large Midwestern city. Of the 238 interviews, 125 were with diverse students selected to ensure variability in race, SES, gender, age, and programs of study. The study found that student perceptions of what assisted in their integration into college were closely linked to institutional actors or agents that facilitated the process for them. Due to this consistency across institutional types and students' races, classes, and SES backgrounds, the findings supported the notion that instructors/faculty, other staff, and students were instrumental in how the two-year students integrated (Deil-Amen, 2011). She also found that, while students were not always able to find communities outside the classroom due to other commitments, a noted desire existed for cultural or personal connections, especially within the African American communities. The conclusions from the study were that key components to students' integrations, persistence, and transitions were the connections made inside the classroom community (Deil-Amen, 2011).

Karp (2016) organized and implemented an extensive review of 128 books, journal articles, and reports to examine the persistence among academically vulnerable students at commuter and 2-year institutions. She defined academically vulnerable students as "those [students] from backgrounds that are correlated with low levels of postsecondary success, including those who are academically underprepared, from underrepresented minority groups, of low socioeconomic status, or having low levels of parental education" (p. 34). The research focused on the types of support offered by community colleges as seen through the commonalities of varying intervention programs with a focus on four key mechanisms: (a)

creating social relationships, (b) clarifying aspirations and enhancing commitment, (c)

developing college know-how, and (d) making college life feasible. Karp noted that strong

networks of social relationships allowed the students to better integrate and helped them

persist toward degree completion.

Clarifying aspirations and enhancing commitment help students understand why

course content is being learned and how it relates to future goals (Booth et al., 2013; Cox,

2009; Karp, 2016). More specifically, students who understand why they are learning what

they are learning have a greater commitment to their persistence and success. Additionally,

online planning tools and active advising showed an increase in grade point averages (GPAs)

of Latinx students (Karp, 2016; Tovar, 2005). Conversely, Karp found that inconsistencies in

advising and advising programs that are only superficially implemented show some early

gains that are not sustainable. In other words, it is not enough to suggest that all colleges that

have advising programs will see an increase in the success and retention of students, but,

rather, that well-defined and intentional student success programs have a greater impact on

student persistence and success. Thus, it becomes increasingly important that part of the

intentionality of these programs is to ensure these services and that the people who provide

them are ethnically and racially aware.

Racial Identity Development

The educational gap that separates students from underrepresented ethnic and racial

groups and the White dominant student population have the potential to impact the long-term

success of people from these underrepresented populations. Carter (2006) found in her

review of institutional research literature related to the academic success of racial and ethnic

groups of students that as the number of students from underrepresented groups in K-12

grows, these students are also disproportionately not graduating from college. She noted that institutional researchers should have a first-hand view of student performance and the interest that these research professionals may have in increasing racial or ethnic diversity in their student populations. Additionally, Carter felt that data reviewed by institutional research offices helped researchers to understand institutional choices based on regions or socio-cultural backgrounds.

Carter (2006) identified three key areas that impact the persistence of underrepresented students: (a) academic preparation, (b) adequate financial aid, and (c) strong support networks in college. She noted that partitioners must craft best practices to meet the needs of various student populations and avoid the inadvertent discrimination of underrepresented minority students. Additionally, Carter discovered that, controlling for preparation, college grades, and remedial courses, African Americans who declared majors did not do as well as African Americans who had not declared a major because many of the academic majors did not create comfortable learning environments for these students.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) reviewed data from the National Survey of Hispanic Students that included information for 287 Latinx students who began college in 1990, of which 58.1% were female. The researchers conducted a factor analysis to reduce the number of measures in the transition-to-college construct and confined the construct to a two-level hierarchical factor. A two-tail test of significance was used to measure the students' sense of belonging. Additionally, the researchers conducted an analysis of participation to identify differences in the students' second and third years of college and the academic activities that may impact students' sense of belonging.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) found a strong relationship between students' sense of belonging and academic and out-of-class engagement. They noted that connecting social and academic engagement may have a positive impact on students' sense of belonging, while students' GPAs were not significantly connected. In student activities, Hurtado and Carter (1997) pointed out that only religious organizations and fraternities and sororities significantly impacted the students' sense of belonging in the second year of college. In the third year of college, membership in student government and sports teams was significant. In contrast, membership in fraternities and sororities was not as significant to the students' senses of belonging. The research by Hurtado and Carter (1997) highlighted the changes to Tinto's student departure model that shifted from the use of integration to the idea of membership. Spaces and places on campus that reflect students' identities and do not ask them to change (integrate) can increase students' sense of belonging and persistence.

To better understand the relationship between interactions with diverse peers and the transition to college, Locks et al. (2008) used data from a multi-institutional, longitudinal research project. The project selected students from institutions based on the institution's strong commitment to diversity, success in diversifying their student bodies, which sometimes included substantial community-building engagement activities. A total of 4,471 diverse students were included in the original research. The researchers selected a sub-sample of the students for analysis. They divided that sample to perform a preliminary analysis on one group (N=1,112) and a confirmatory analysis on the other group (N=1,234). For this research, it is crucial to note that 69% of the sample was White; 17% were Asian American/Pacific Islander; 8% were Hispanic, Latino, or Chicano; 4% were African American; and 1% were American Indian/Alaskan Native. Additionally, 67% of the sample

was female. Locks et al. (2008) used an expectation-maximization algorithm to replace missing data in the independent variables to understand the maximum likelihood estimates when a small proportion of the data was missing. Less than 10% of the cases were missing variables included in the study (Locks et al., 2008).

Locks and her colleagues worked to build information regarding students' sense of belonging in college, with specific attention given to racial climate. As might be imagined, Locks et al. (2008) found that students of color were more likely than their White peers to have greater precollege exposure to people of color, more significant predispositions to engage in diversity-related activities in college, more likely to have positive interactions with diverse peers, more likely to spend less time socializing, and more likely to live with their parents in their second year of college. The researchers also noted that no significant differences existed between students of color and their White peers in the frequency of anxious interactions across race/ethnicity and their sense of belonging in the second year of college. What is most important to note about the research is that frequent positive interactions with diverse peers helped the students develop a greater sense of belonging, regardless of race. They also pointed out how students, who lived at home or did less socializing during their first years of college, had lower levels of a sense of belonging. These findings indicated that frequent, intentional interactions assist students in developing a strong sense of belonging.

In an effort to understand learning community outcomes, how they are developed, and their impact on student success in a community college setting, Bonet and Walters (2016) selected eight sections of the same course at a college in New York that served English as a second language students who were considered to be struggling toward degree

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completion. Four of the courses were part of a learning community, and four were not. A sample size of 267 students, of which 95 students participated in the learning community, was developed from the four courses. A total of 20 students were eliminated due to missing data. The students were asked to complete an online survey that measured engagement; however, the data were not used as part of the final research due to the low response rate. Data concerning the students' grades and attendance were gathered at the end of the semester, and the information was disaggregated using a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Bonet and Walters (2016) found that the students in the learning communities were better engaged, had higher attendance rates, and completed the course with higher grades when compared to their peers who were not members of the learning communities. The researchers noted that only 8% of the students in the learning community courses, compared to 28% of students in the regular courses, received failing grades. Additionally, they found 61% of students in the learning community courses received either an A or a B in the class, while 41% of regular courses obtained grades of A or B. They noted that faculty-student engagement in community colleges along with maximized curriculum design improved class attendance and helped drive student engagement and learning. While the focus of this work was on English as a second language students, a clear connection existed related to the findings between students from varied ethnic and racial backgrounds and students who were not native English speakers.

While Bonet and Walters (2016) discovered students in learning community courses experience more academic engagement than students in regular courses, González Canché et al. (2014) were interested in how access to information influenced students' decisions to

attend college and their career choices. They reviewed data from a 2012 survey of a Southern community college to complete a social network analysis to understand how varied sources of information impacted students' decisions to attend college as well as their future career fields. The data consisted of surveys completed by 84 respondents, of which 67.5% were women, and 34.5% were over the age of 25. The researchers viewed 17 sources of information to see to what extent each source contributed to college choice. They used a membership network analysis approach to measure the importance of each source regarding both academic and career decisions. In a second process, they used the **con**vergence of iterated **cor**relations (CONCOR) method to determine similarities in the networks of information that the students experienced at the community college. During this part of the data review process, the researchers noted that different relationships had varied benefits for the individuals and were connected to their roles and/or positions (González Canché et al., 2014). The data were further disaggregated around gender with the understanding that men and women may rely on different members of a network because of their gender.

González Canché et al. (2014) found that the most significant sources of information about the participants' college decisions were their high school teachers, their high school classmates, their sibling(s), their extended family members and college representatives. When they explored the data as a whole, the researchers discovered that parental guardians did not play a fundamental role in students' decisions to attend community college. When the data were disaggregated for gender, father/male guardians were in the top five for male and female students. Additionally, students of both genders noted that the sole non-school figure who impacted their decisions was a father/male guardian (González Canché et al., 2014). The researchers also that female students placed a lot of emphasis on recruitment materials and

college representatives when they decided to attend a community college. A significant finding González Canché et al. identified was that individual connections had the greatest capacity to impact students' decisions. While online social networks were important, nothing compared to the relationships created through personal contact, which helped to increase social capital.

Social Capital

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a conditional social construct (Santrock, 2004). This status is imposed on people to be used as a comparison or a way to show a difference. The construct of SES or class is based on economics, opportunity, and the ability or means to influence others or outcomes. Santrock (2004) defined SES as "the grouping of people with similar occupational, educational, and economic characteristics" (p. 583). If, as noted by Santrock (2004) and Woolfolk (2007), a critical aspect of SES is the ability to control resources and participate in society's rewards or the relative standing in society based on income, power, background, and prestige, then many, if not most, students classified as low-SES are, by definition, limited in their abilities to participate. As a result, the challenges for many low-SES students begin before their entrances to their institutions. The ability to control and duplicate resources can be better understood through the lens of habitus.

Bourdieu (1977) defined habitus as this unconscious, internalized force that places biases on individuals through the social classes in which they were born and raised and which awards them certain amounts of cultural capital that they can use to take advantage of the opportunities available to them in a given context or field. Bourdieu's theory suggested that individuals from lower-SES may have higher amounts of social capital within their communities, but that capital diminishes as they move into environments with individuals

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from higher-SES. As low-SES students attend colleges and universities, they often move into environments where their previously assumed social capital is not only diminished; it is all but erased. Differences in habitus may then contribute to a student's decision to delay entry into college.

To better understand delayed college entry and socioeconomic gaps, Wells and Lynch (2012) reviewed data from the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS) of 2002, which surveyed students at grade 10 in 2002, grade 12 in 2004, and post-high school graduates in 2006. They used the ELS because it was considered the most current at the time; targeted both students and parents/guardians; and included information about planned delayed college entry, enrollment, and SES. The final analysis consisted of 11,330 students in grade 12 in 2004 who completed the survey during the first two touchpoints and who were expected to attend some type of post-secondary education. The researchers further limited their population to only those students who graduated high school ($n = 10,900$).

Wells and Lynch (2012) divided their study into phases. The dependent variable for the first phase of the study was based on a survey question which asked students in grade 12 whether they planned to continue their education sometime in the future. The students who responded "yes" and qualified their answers by stating that they intended to delay their education by a year or more were categorized as students who planned to delay. The second phase of their research used the actual delay as a dependent variable and defined delayers as those students with college expectations who did not enroll in college in the semester following their high school completion. Additionally, Wells and Lynch (2012) used three independent variables commonly used to determine SES: family income, parental education, and parental occupation.

Wells and Lynch (2012) found that 11% of the students in their study planned to delay college entry. Of those students who planned to delay, 18% expected to delay for more than one year. The researchers also found that 85% of the students who graduated enrolled in college immediately and, among those students who did not plan to delay their college entries, an expected 91% enrolled immediately. To their surprise, Wells and Lynch (2012) noted that just over half of the students who intended to delay their entries to college enrolled immediately.

The researchers completed a regression of their results to better understand how socioeconomic factors impacted their findings. Through the regression process, they found that both lower-income and first-generation students had greater odds of planning to delay college, while non-first-generation and higher-SES students had much greater odds of enrolling in college immediately. Their research also found that unplanned delays often resulted from barriers related to parental education levels. Low-income parents often lacked information and/or familiarity with the process of becoming a college student. Additionally, Wells and Lynch (2012) noted that their research implied that delayed entry to college, specifically related to SES, "contribute[d] to reproducing social inequality via one's habitus" (p. 688). When and how one enters college contributes to success.

Deciding when and where to begin post-secondary education is not a new aspect of the education process. To better understand how social class impacts choices, Goldrick-Rab (2006) reviewed national longitudinal data from post-secondary transcripts drawn from three series of the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The data included interviews with 12,144 individuals and transcripts for 8,889 students who attended college. A total of 15,562

transcripts were received as part of the eight-year longitudinal study. Goldrick-Rab decided to exclude summer-only transcripts, transcripts for Native Americans due to the small sample size, and students who did not begin at four-year institutions from the study. The final sample size was 4,629 and was representative of 1.5 million high school seniors enrolled in four-year colleges and universities.

According to Goldrick-Rab (2006), family background and college attendance were impacted by high school preparation and students' expectations to obtain degrees. The researcher also found some implications that the rigor of high school coursework, which was evident, is related to social class and delayed nontraditional students' entrance into college. Specifically, Goldrick-Rab (2006) noted that students in the bottom 20% of the SES population in the study had a greater propensity to stop out or drop out of college and three times more likely to move between colleges and universities during their educational careers. Additionally, students with lower high school GPAs and with average college GPAs showed more interruptions in their college education than students with the highest GPAs in high school. Important to this finding is that uninterrupted transfer students, meaning that students who moved institutions without a gap in enrollment tended to be the students with the highest college GPAs and were from higher-SES families.

According to Engstrom and Tinto (2008), low-SES students are readily reminded that "even though institutions do not intentionally exclude students from college, [it] does not mean that they are including them as fully valued members of the institution and providing them with support that enables them to translate access into success" (p. 50). From the creation of class schedules to the different forms of testing, students who are not academically prepared are at a disadvantage. Students from lower-SES or working-class

backgrounds and those students who were the first in their families to attend college are disproportionately more likely to drop out of high school; end their educations at the high school level; enter community colleges or vocational programs; or enter college, but not complete bachelor's degrees (Aronson, 2008; Barry et al., 2009; Smith, 2008). Not having a parent or sibling who attended college serves as a reminder that their habitus may hinder the success of low-SES students. Aronson (2008), reflecting on similar research conducted by Bourdieu in 1973, noted that "the attitudes, aspirations, and worldviews of the working class (their habitus, or internalization of objective circumstances) do not allow them access to the dominant cultural system created by the elite and rewarded in schools" (p. 42). The ease with which students replicate their circumstances reflects the difficulty students have in creating new experiences. First-generation students, compared to their non-first-generation peers, may experience considerably more difficulties in the creation of new experiences and their understanding of their social capital and self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy and attitude influence the personal attributes that a student brings to the transition process from high school to college (Strayhorn, 2007, 2016; Tinto, 1975, 1988, 1997). These influences, in turn, can affect students' adjustments during their transitional processes. Both self-efficacy and attitude, in turn, affect how an institution supports the student and provides strategies that impact student success and retention. Academic and social adjustment varies from student to student; the elements of social capital that students possess can impact the beginning of their transitions to college, and they may continue to struggle. Notably, for the purpose of this study, it is important to understand the experiences of women of color with larger populations of women college students.

Feminism Mystique of African American and Latina/Chicana Women

Feminism, in its most general terms, can be viewed as a belief based on the idea that women should receive all rights equal to those of men. This idea of rights should, at the very least, include employment and education. Feminism is both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women. Feminism is sometimes misportrayed as a need for female dominance and the emasculation of men. According to hooks (1991, 2015), feminism is a project, both political and philosophical, with the purpose of ending systems of dominance and transform the lives of all individuals. Feminism is a political movement through which all forms of sexism will find their end (McFee, 2018). Feminism in the United States has evolved over time and is most often expressed in three distinct waves first wave, second wave, and third wave.

The first wave of feminism in the United States began in the late 19th century and continued through the early 20th century. The first wave of feminism primarily focused on the women's suffrage movement. During this time in American history, discussions about women's right to vote and women's participation in politics led to the scrutiny of the inequalities between men and women. The first wave of the feminist movement evolved in America when Black women became aware that they not only had to carry out a fight against racism but also a struggle against Black men who took on the social and cultural norms of the time, which encouraged bias and discrimination against women (Branch, 2020; Breines, 2007; Hein, 2017; hooks, 1991, 1995; Jain & Turner, 2011).

The second wave of feminism began in the early 1960s and focused on social and cultural inequalities. The second wave of feminism was born within the context of the Civil Rights Movement and examined the growth of communities of color in the United States.

This movement was vocal in matters such as sexual liberation, childcare, health, welfare, education, work, and reproductive rights. Along with the second wave was the emergence of the Womanist movement, which is discussed below.

The third wave of feminism was born in the early 1990s and continued into the 2000s. This wave was critical of the second wave for excluding and overlooking disempowered groups. The third wave embraced the diversity of race and ethnicities, nationalities, religion, and cultural backgrounds of all women.

Although Black and Latina women participated in the first wave of the feminist movement, the Black and Latina feminist movement came fully to life during the second wave of the feminist movement. hooks (1995) noted that White women who dominated and articulated feminist theory had "little or no understanding of White supremacy as a racial politics, of the psychological impact of class, of their political status within a racist, sexist capitalist state" p. 272. Both the Black feminist or womanist movement and Chicana/Latina feminist movement are related directly to the feminist development of women of color outside the space of other women, specifically that of White women.

These theories speak directly to lived experience and realities and Black and Chicana/Latina women and provide a voice for women whose lived experiences remain outside the understanding of others (Hein, 2017). An understanding of womanist and Chicana/Latina women feminist theories help to focus the current research in a manner that recognizes the process of becoming and being a woman of color.

As noted in Chapter 1, *The Feminine Mystique* as a book and idea is partially credited as to have influenced the second wave of feminism. The feminine mystique highlighted the flaws in the ideas that the feminine, the female role was to be wife to the husband, mother to

her children, and keeper and manager of the household (Napikoski, 2020). This artificial idea of femininity and that the role of women, held by the greater society, discouraged the fulfillment of one's individual potential and that of her female children. The challenge with the feminine mystique, as an idea, is that it speaks primarily to the roles of middle- and upper-class White women and does not recognize the spaces and place of poor White women and that of Black and Latinx women of color. The absence of Black and Latinx women's voices gave rise to women of color feminist movements and their need to ensure their experiences, not just as women, but as complex individuals whose experiences included race, sex, sexual orientation, and experiences within their own communities. The experience of these Black and brown women led to movements like the Combahee River Collective.

The Combahee River Collective came into existence in 1974 when several Black and Brown lesbian feminists needed a new way of learning and understanding about the experiences of women like them. The purpose of this collective was to start a political movement to combat racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression against Black women (Branch, 2020; Breines, 2007). These Combahee River Collective women of color met regularly through the "Women of Color: Barriers and Bridges" workshops in Boston and discussed the barriers that separate them, including racism, class privilege, educational privilege, color, language, culture, and sexual preference (Breines, 2007). Breines noted the women brought out the positive links and bridges that exist and that could be used to build networks among women of color. This group of women set the stage for the Black feminist movement.

Jain and Turner (2011) noted that, during the early 1980s, non-White, female scholars began to question their spaces within the practice of feminism. Black and Latina scholars like

Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzualdúa, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks "felt that feminism did not

explicitly examine the intersections of race, class, sexuality, and gender" (Jain & Turner,

2011, p. 77). Not finding their faces and voices in the feminist movement led to scholars

questioning the term 'feminist' and the ultimate birth of womanism. The term Phillips (2006)

noted as womanism can be defined as an epistemological perspective based on the collective

experiences of Black women or other non-White women.

African American Feminism

Alice Walker indicates that African American feminism theory, or more

precisely, womanism, is perhaps the deepest hue of feminist thought. Walker first used

the term womanist in her 1980 short story *Coming Apart*, where she stated, "the wife

never considered herself a feminist – though she is, of course, a 'womanist.' A

'womanist' is a feminist, only more common" (p.100). This idea of womanist being

more common brings it to life in the everyday experiences of non-White women.

Walker artfully used her reputation to construct her theory of womanism. Her work gave

a greater insight into ideas of feminism, civil rights, and the complexities of non-White

women. Most notably, Walker (1983) defined womanist through four aspects of being:

- From womanish. (Opp. Of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious.
- A woman who loves other women, sexually, and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance to laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in,

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"Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" ans.: Well, you know the colored garden is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."

- Loves music. Love dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Love the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.
- Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender. (pp. xi-xii)

Walker's definition of womanism is drawn from the intersections of race, gender, and class and an understanding of self that provided space for other non-White women to explore aspects of womanism.

The goal of womanist theory is not to truncate the development of identities but rather to expand a way of being and doing so with an added lens of understanding. Branch (2020) noted that "Black feminist research draws from the postmodernism paradigm and challenges current society's way of thinking" (p. 66). Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) stated that womanists often demonstrate three characteristics: (a) an embrace of the maternal as a communal responsibility; (b) an ethic of risk and engagement with oppressive realities; and (c) political clarity, that is, understanding society with a focus on reality.

Latina/Chicana Feminism

Latina/Chicana feminism emerged in response to both the feminist and the Chicano civil rights movements (Moya, 2001). Moya noted that Chicanas, who worked with Chicanos to ensure the issues of family and community were at the forefront of the civil rights movement, found that the needs of women were out of balance with that of their Chicano counterparts. According to Moya, Chicana feminists wanted to achieve gender equality, but that did not emphasize the value of family loyalty that the Chicano

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community stated it wanted to achieve. Monzó (2014) underscored the idea that feminist

theorists must be mindful of the role that brown bodies play as we try to understand the

history of the oppressed. Monzó noted that for Chicanas/Latinas that:

> Our bodies have endured the brutality of the imperial being, of the men in our lives, and of the exploitative backbreaking work we often do in factories across the world and in our own homes. Our bodies have been made to twist and turn at the beck and call of others. It is also in our bodies and through our bodies that we hold and share our love, tenderness, and caring but in this too we have been told how it is appropriate to feel and touch. (p. 87)

Chicana/Latina feminism is then rooted in the idea of understanding the Chicana/Latina

feminist experience is rooted in the experience of the body as a whole. Unlike the White

feminist movement, which is seldom impacted by race, the experience of

Chicana/Latina feminism cannot be expressed without an understanding of race.

In 1983, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa published the anthology *This*

Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color. They were concerned

that the feminist movement of the time was dominated by the White-female narrative.

While their book included other non-White voices, it highlighted the need for Latina

voices to be included in the feminist arena. With identity so ingrained in the greater

Latino/Chicano community, Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983) noted that Chicanas needed

to look deep within themselves to come to an understanding with their own suffering, so

they challenge and change themselves their "most cherished block-hard convictions" (p.

i). Again, it is not the binary of male and female only that separates Latina/Chicana

feminism from the White feminist movement, but the additional need to recognize the

full identity of one's self. Zavella (1989) stated:

> Feminists of color are challenging one of the basic assumptions about women's culture - the notion that feminist theory should be grounded in the commonalities of women's experience. Instead, we argue that the structure in which women's

experiences are rooted becomes the primary analytical locus, which recognizes profound differences among women. ln my view, feminist discourse should borrow from and "reconstruct" the discourse on race, the "new ethnicity," and the social construct of "other." This literature is not just about people of color but about dynamics and meanings of white/ other, and inextricably, male/female. Chicanas, on the other hand, should formulate a variety of feminist expressions, for I believe our solidarity with other feminists is primarily ideological, with common interests based on shared feminist principles that place women at the center. As we struggle towards many feminisms - multicultural feminisms, and many colored feminisms - perhaps the ambivalence of Chicana "womanists" will become less pronounced. (p. 32)

The current research hoped to disrupt the Black/White, *racial*, and male/female, *gender*, binaries and gives voice at the intersections of womanhood, Black and Latinx women identity, and becoming a college student.

Intersectionality

A greater understanding of intersectionality will give a complete voice to the experience of women of color as they transition from employment to being college students. Identity development is at the core of the current study. Central to identity development is the understanding that identity neither exists as one aspect of a person nor does identity development occur in silos; instead, identity develops across the spectrum of our experiences at the intersection of our identity and when and where we engage the world. Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality and stated that "because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (p. 140). For Crenshaw, intersectionality is the space where social identities such as gender, race, and class interconnect through systems of discrimination and disadvantage. Intersectionality allows a lens for thinking and engaging social issues (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989). The current research sought to understand the experiences of

women through the telling of their stories. An understanding of identity development through an intersectionality lens will help to expand the understanding of their experiences.

Though intersectionality has emerged in a number of academic spheres, Cho et al. (2013) noted that the study of intersectionality could be framed in three primary areas of academic engagement: (a) application of an intersectional framework or investigation of dynamics, (b) a theoretical and methodological paradigm based on a discursive debate about the scope and content of intersectionality, and (c) an intersectional lens of political intervention. Researchers within the first area, application, and dynamics suggested that the goal within the area was to build on or adapt intersectionality to context-specific inquires. The second area, scope, and content explored how intersectionality had been developed, adopted, and adapted across varied disciplines. The third area, political intervention, is expressed by researchers as praxis. The praxis of intersectionality is then defined as:

> [E]ncompassing a wide range of phenomena, from society- and work-centered movements to demanding greater economic justice for low-income women of color; to legal and policy advocacy that seeks to remedy gender and racial discrimination; to state-targeted movements to abolish prisons, immigration restrictions, and military interventions that are nominally neutral with respect to race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and nation, but are, in fact, disproportionally harmful to communities of color and to women and gays in those communities. (Cho et al., p. 786)

Cho et al. (2013) suggested that intersectionality might be better viewed as a heuristic device that can be used to explore social phenomena. From their perspective, intersectionality is an aid for analysis that supports discovery.

The use of intersectionality, to aid in the way to understand how women experience transition, allowed me to explore the experiences of women of color, who return to college after being employed in- or- outside the home, through the multiple lenses that separate their experiences from that of other women and from the experiences of men of color. The

research added another layer to the voices of women of color and illustrated that their experiences should not be actively equated to the experiences of other women or men who share a common racial identity. To that end, Cho et al. (2013) noted that it is impossible to disentangle intersectionality from how power is understood and engaged.

Aspects of Cho et al.'s (2013) study that connect to the current study are political intersectionality and knowledge production and women and gender studies. Political intersectionality gives researchers and practitioners a tool by which to reshape language about the systems that perpetuate single-axis approaches that suggest one size fits all. As for women and gender studies and this research, intersectionality, when taken in its fullness, expands the interpretive lenses that produce, shape, and disseminate knowledge. The current research is not just about women's transitions to students; it is about how their identities have been shaped and influenced their experiences as women of color.

Transition Theory

As emphasized in the previous section, the role of social capital in the transition process is crucial because it can impact how a student experiences college. Bennett and Okinaka (1990) discussed trauma associated with the transition through the isolation a student may experience when unfamiliar with the norms, values, and expectations at an institution. Social capital can further exasperate the college experiences of low-SES students. Those students from more privileged backgrounds have higher rates of success than their low-SES peers (NCES, 2002), who often have delayed enrollment or are parents with the responsibility of raising and caring for children. Students with greater social capital will often have access to information that enables them to follow more traditional pathways to and through college. The degree to which students have access to information impacts their social

capital and can interrupt the movement along their educational journeys (Goldrick-Rab, 2006). The social capital that students bring with them can affect them academically and socially in their transitions.

Understanding what students bring of themselves, their habitus, to their transitions helps determine what types of systems they may try to replicate and how their lived experiences influence their transitions. Schlossberg et al. (1989) found the resources or deficits for coping with change in the situation of the transition impacted how a transition was experienced. For a first-generation student, the transition to a new educational environment may be a matter of timing or a matter of choice or imposed upon the student due to circumstances beyond the student's control. As a parent, the student may already be surrounded by other stressors. Depending on the circumstances, the student may perceive the transition as something positive or negative, and it may be expected or unexpected. Perceptions, stressors, and the effects of the timing can impact their transitions, which, in turn, determine the amount of support the student will need to address the situation.

Transitions, in general, for poor and working-class students are not just about entering higher education but about interacting with students from higher-SES backgrounds who see college not as a choice but an expectation or right. Crozier et al. (2008) and Reay et al. (2005) noted that low-SES students, unlike their middle-class counterparts, make not one but two or more transitional steps in their moves to higher education; the second step is from one social class to another. Research by Engstrom and Tinto (2008) found that "for too many low income [low-SES] students, the open door of American higher education and the opportunity it provides has become a revolving door" (p. 47), with academic preparedness as the number one contributor. Open access institutions, such as community colleges can contribute to this

"revolving door" view by providing access without adequate support. Many institutions are just not prepared to assist low-SES students in their transitions to college.

Female students of this study had opportunities to articulate how they transitioned from employment to college. The general definition of transition states there must first be an understanding of the transition itself. Schlossberg et al. (1995) defined transition as "any event, or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles…that involves changes as well as losses" (pp. 27-28). This definition gives legitimacy to the claim that students' transitions from employment to college can be viewed as events, and any event can be studied as a phenomenon. While some students may not view transition as an overwhelming process, a transition, by definition, does not need to be noticeable or overpowering. Research by Schlossberg et al. (1995) supported this idea and concluded that transitions include apparent life changes (e.g., high school graduation, job entry, marriage, the birth of the first child, bereavement). They also found that transitions can include subtle changes (e.g., loss of career aspirations) or the non-occurrence of anticipated events (e.g., an expected job promotion that never comes through).

Movements throughout transitions (i.e., moving into the process, through the process, out beyond the transition itself) can be struggles for some students. Understanding what influences various aspects of student transitions can help colleges and universities determine where to strategically place people and resources to assist during the transition process. Transition theory, as outlined by Schlossberg et al. (1989), can help bring greater focus to different aspects of the transition process as the transition is experienced. The support, environment, strategies, and how a student expresses their sense of self can impact the transition to becoming a student.

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The institution can have a dramatic impact on student persistence and achievement. The practices, strategies, and cultures of the campus can create pathways or barriers to student persistence and completion (Swail et al., 2003). This next section examines the role of institutional factors in student persistence and completion.

<p style="text-align: center;">**Institutional Factors**</p>

Belonging is a key factor in several studies of transition to college (Barry et al., 2009; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Locks et al., 2008). A sense of belonging can be defined as a student's sense of social integration that results from the intersections of academic and social reasons (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Hurtado and Carter (1997) longitudinally studied a National Survey of Hispanic Students (NSHS), a sample of 272 Latinx students who attended 127 colleges. The students from the sample were top PSAT achievers and semifinalists for a national scholarship award. The researchers found that frequent interactions and discussions of course material outside of class and tutoring helped the Latinx students feel a greater sense of belonging.

As a follow-up, Hurtado and Carter (1997) examined these students in their second and third years of college. Looking at the students across the spectrum of their college experiences helps identify ways by which students can engage with the campus to feel a stronger sense of belonging. When students feel as if they belong on campus, their abilities to successfully transition academically and socially are positively affected, while students who perceive hostile campus climates are directly affected in their sense of belonging on campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). The researchers also suggested that students who felt more at ease during their transitions in their first years of college had a greater sense of belonging, which can influence perceptions of campus climates in students' second years. Their research

suggests that ease of transition from employment to college can have lasting effects during a student's time at an institution.

The development and integration of students' sense of belonging are important for all students, particularly students of color, who may also be first-generation college students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Locks et al. (2008) discussed the idea of belonging and how it may be impacted by racial and campus climates. The authors utilized longitudinal data from a national, multi-institutional research project that sampled 4,471 students from 10 public universities who were at the beginning of their first years of college. The students were surveyed again after their second years. Locks et al. (2008) found that positive interactions with diverse peers increased a student's sense of belonging to campus. It is important to note that these interactions are based on who is being interacted with and how they are being interacted with, in the college environment - making it the quality of the interaction, not the quantity of the interaction, that influences a student's success (Locks et al., 2008). How a college or university facilitates interactions between individual students, student peer groups, and institutional representatives can affect students' transitions. As such, the focus should be on ensuring quality interactions from the institution itself.

Attinasi (1989) posited that students adjust to college through aspects of cognitive mapping, where students gain an understanding of physical, social, cognitive, and/or academic environments. Attinasi conducted a qualitative study at a large public southwestern university. The sample for the study consisted of 18 persisting and non-persisting college students at the beginning of their first and second years of college. The researcher identified critical themes about the nature of college-going experiences and found that student interactions were the primary factor in developing a sense of belonging during the students'

transitions. He noted that the interactions helped the students develop the strategies needed to negotiate the social, physical, cognitive, and academic environments. Attinasi also identified ways by which the institution can assist students to develop strategies for their cognitive and academic mapping processes through programs such the campus tours or orientations, which assist in successful transitions to college. These events can be useful tools to help students who enter college develop a cognitive map of the university experience through intentional programs, such as mentoring or peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing. While Attinasi focused on first-year, first-time students, the implications of his study can be more broadly applied. Institutions need to be aware of the intentional and unintentional factors that affect students' transitions and use their role as gatekeepers to ensure that processes are in place to shape interactions that can benefit students during their transitions.

Institutions must be constantly aware of the connections that exist among support, environment, strategies, and sense of self to ensure students have a successful transition. Knowing what students bring to campus life determines how their situations will transition to the institution, which will determine the types of support needed, followed by the programs and interactions that are necessary for students to engage. Utilizing strategies that connect support, environment, strategies, and sense of self may lead to improving a student's understanding of self, which will influence other aspects of transition. A person's sense of self and the ability to cope with ambiguity are resources that a person can bring to the transition process (Schlossberg et al., 1989).

Emotional Intelligence and Academic Success

Emotional intelligence, or the ability to beware of, control, and express personal emotions (Parker et al. 2006), is significant to transitioning. Parker et al. (2006) identified a

connection between emotional intelligence and academic achievement in students transitioning from high school to a post-secondary environment. Parker et al. asserted that challenges, both personal and interpersonal, created by the learning environment increase stress levels and impact retention during the first year of college. The researchers surveyed entering freshmen at one university site and had them complete a measure of emotional intelligence. The participants were then divided into two groups. The first group included 213 students who had withdrawn from the university before their second year. The second group included 213 students who persisted into their second year. Both groups were made up of a matched sample based on age, gender, and ethnicity. Parker et al. (2006) found that the students who persisted into their second years scored higher on a range of emotional and social competencies. The more quickly a student is able to feel connected to the university setting, the more confident his/her sense of self may be, allowing the student to assess the situation and determine what support or strategies may be necessary for a successful transition.

Phinney and Haas (2003) noted that students who successfully cope with their transitions to college communicated a greater sense of self-efficacy, believed in their abilities to succeed, and felt supported by others. Research by Hutz and Martin (2007) considered coping efficacy with ethnocultural differences and their relationship to college adjustment. They found that coping efficacy may be in place for some students but can be strengthened and further developed, as traditionally marginalized students may need to develop these coping skills even before they transition to the university. Hutz and Martin (2007) found that ethnocultural students reported lower levels of academic confidence and less positive attitudes toward the university. Academic confidence and attitude can affect a student's sense

of self in the transition to college life. Students who do not feel that they belong may not rely on their individual sense of self to traverse through transitional obstacles (Hutz & Martin, 2007; Parker et al., 2006; Phinney & Haas, 2003; Schlossberg et al., 1989). To place this information in context, it is important to discuss how individuals understand their transitions.

<h3 style="text-align:center">Individuals' Understanding of Transitions</h3>

Evans et al. (2010) stated that, as a theory, transition only exists if it is defined by the individual experiencing it. This statement suggests that if an event does not have personal significance to the individual, it may not meet the theoretical aspects of transitions and may be of little importance to the individual; however, the significance of an event does not mean that a transition does not occur. Schlossberg et al. (1995) and Evans et al. (2010) echoed the importance of allowing an individual to give voice to her experiences of moving through a transition which, in the current research study, is the transition from employment to college. The goal was to allow the participants to use their authentic voices to define their transitions. To apply the transition theory to the current research, then the transitions must possess personal meanings, which were evident for each individual, and was a distinct awareness of the type, context, and impact of the transition (Evans et al., 2010; Schlossberg et al., 1995). These aspects of change were acknowledged by the individual as they moved from one identity (worker) to another (student).

Evans et al. (2010) identified three non-discrete types of transitions: (a) anticipated transition, which occurs predictably; (b) unanticipated transition, not predictable or scheduled; and (c) nonevents transition, expected but do not occur. When examining student transitions, all three types of transitions are possible. Students who have been accepted to colleges or universities expect changes; they may not be able to identify the specifics of the

changes, but they are anticipated. Unanticipated changes can include the amount of work needed to be successful, the variances in the support that they will receive from others, and differences in student and faculty expectations. Nonevents, as described by Evans et al. (2010), can be classified into three areas that are personally related to the individual's aspirations: (a) ripple, felt due to a nonevent of someone close to an individual; (b) resultant, caused by an event; and (c) delayed, anticipating an event that might still happen (e.g., receiving a better or worse grade than expected). A challenge for some low-SES underprepared first-generation adult learners is that nonevents may be viewed as unnecessary hurdles during a transition.

Evans et al. (2010) noted that nonevents are associated more with probability rather than a possibility. The aspect of nonevents can be explained by the context and impact of the event. Context refers to the relationship of the person to the transition and the setting in which the transition takes place. The impact of the transition is determined by the degree to which a transition alters a person's daily life (Evans et al., 2010). As noted in Chapter 1, the transition to college for low-SES first-generation adult learners can be viewed as a stressful event due to when and where the transition begins. The context of where the education occurs (at a college or university) and the impact of how a person's life changes (becoming a college student) is significantly new to the individual. The level of preparedness helped to determine if the transition were positive or negative, as do friendships and peer relationships.

Peer friendships and relationships influence students' successful transitions to college. Peers can be an instrumental support factor in students' transitions to college, and friends can be both supportive and detrimental to students' successful transitions. Friends and friendship can have a dual impact because these relationships exist both in and out of college

students' peer groups (Antonio, 2004). Peer relationships are most often viewed in the literature within the contexts of campus environments and serve as environmental sources of socio-cultural norms (Antonio, 2004). The difference between these two types of social groups (e.g., peers and friends) can often affect the way a student transitions to college.

Peer-to-peer interactions can help students transitioning to college adjust socially and academically. Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2005) conducted a study based upon a larger, multi-institutional study of San Diego high school students. The authors used mixed methods research that employed a survey, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews to determine peer relationships, which may take the form of mentoring or other types of formalized programming. They discovered that peer relationships could foster the type of social and psychological orientation necessary for students entering an institution for the first time. These relationships can strengthen entering students' access to institutional resources that these students may not know to access. Peer relationships provided a mental health function for students as well since these relationships offered a forum for students to share intimate challenges and receive emotional support (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005).

Pascarella et al. (1996) noted that students' openness to diversity suggested that students move in the direction of greater openness and tolerance when interacting with peers. Pascarella et al. (1996) implemented a national, multi-institution study over the course of two years and surveyed the same students in 1992 and 1993. The sample of 3,331 first-year students was a cross-section of the population of 18 four-year colleges and universities from 15 states (Pascarella et al., 1996). They found that the interactions that the students had with their peers had significant positive effects on their openness to diversity.

Meyer, Spencer, and French (2009) conducted a study of 52 first-year students at a small, liberal arts university to address interpersonal connections, which also impact openness to diversity. The results indicated that interpersonal connections made with peers had the greatest impact on positive adjustments to college. These finds are reflective of the findings of Martin et al. (1999) and Terenzini et al. (1994) and highlight how the environments of an institution can impact students' transitions. While the studies are generalizable, the theme of social adjustment to friends and peers can be found across each study.

The transition theory expresses transitions through a series of phases: moving in, moving through, and moving out (Evans et al., 2010; Schlossberg et al., 1995), and be successful through the transition process, a person must be able to cope throughout the change. Once a student is accepted to college, Evan et al. (2010) confirmed that the individual "moves from a preoccupation with the transition to an integration of the transition" (p. 234). For students transitioning from employment to college, the transition process can begin with the decision to apply or be accepted to a college or university. The integration, or moving through the process, occurs during the time a person is a student or in the process of becoming a student, which is impacted by other characteristics, including a student's gender identity.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the theories that assist in understanding student success in college. Student development, viewed through the lens of a sense of belonging, student attrition, and student integration, helps explain student aspirations and how these are influenced by identity development. Student attrition and integration are further impacted by

SES and how their transition is experienced. Intersectionality is crucial to understanding how women of color transition and succeed in college, with the intent to understand multiple identities of race, gender, social class, and other socio-cultural elements. The theories highlighted in this chapter reflect how identity impacts how services are developed to assist a growing population of students, particularly women who transition from employment to college.

Chapter 3 will provide further explore literature relevant to the theories presented here, especially a brief overview of the politics of gender that illuminates issues of intersectionality and the lives of six women as they transition. This discussion is followed by key areas of importance related to women and their educational experiences. Finally, the literature review provides a discussion on how women succeed and factors that contribute to that success.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women continue to outpace men in their pursuit of higher education degrees. Nationally, in 2016, more than 3 million students enrolled in post-secondary education for the first time (Hussar & Bailey, 2016), and women represent approximately 56% of that number. The primary purpose of this study was to give voice to the experiences of women as they transitioned to college from employment in or outside the home. This chapter presents the literature review using several bodies of literature and conceptual resources that will give shape to the current research study. A literature review for qualitative research is necessary to position the research and ground it within the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the literature demonstrates how the current research connects and contributes to the body of research that currently exists (Maxwell, 2013).

There are several notable gaps in the literature pertaining to one of the most glaring areas regarding the gaps in the literature of college success when examining the literature surrounding Black men and women or Latinx. A simple EBSCO host search of the phrase "college success" produced 26,842 articles from 2010 through 2019. A change in the search term to include "Black male" produced 133 articles from 2010 through 2019. A simple change in the phrase replacing "male" with "female" produced 74 articles in that same time frame. The same database search using the phrase "Latino male college success" produced 29 articles and "Latina female college success" produced five articles during the 2010 and 2019 timeframe. This process alone showed that 44% more articles exist about Black male and Black female success, and 88% more articles exist about Latino male than Latina female success. The fact that the current research highlighted the lack of research on women in

higher education is not to say that research about the college success of men of color is not important, only that there is a lack of research about the success of African American and Latinx women who attend college in larger numbers than their male counterparts.

The following literature review provides a brief overview of the politics of gender followed by two key areas of importance: (a) the college experience of women and (b) the success of women.

The Politics of Gender

Butler (2015) suggested that gender is political, and the power associated with one's gender is represented by that person's space and place in society and the history of that society. Chun et al. (2013) stated that "all politics are identity politics" (p. 937), and politics are based on sexism as a way or system of doing things. hooks (1995) noted:

> Sexism as a system of domination is institutionalized, but it has never determined in an absolute way the fate of all women in this society. Being oppressed means the absence of choices. It is the primary point of contact between the oppressed and the oppressor. (p. 273)

Whether intentional or not, men have used their sex and the assumed power of their gender to decide the place of women within society. In short, men have assumed the role of oppressor. While the depth and breadth of the works by Butler (2015), Chun et al. (2013), and hooks (1995) are beyond the scope of the current research, this information highlights how perceived power, or the lack of the power, impacts how someone is seen in society, and how they are portrayed in academic literature.

The term identity politics was coined by the Combahee River Collective as part of the black feminist group's discussion of sex, gender, identity, and power (Combahee River Collective, 1977). The Combahee River Collective stated:

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking… This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. (p. 232)

Identity then is the understanding of self, including race, sex, gender, role, etc., and identity politics brings into focus where and how self exists within society. For women, this can be a complex discussion. The focus on African American and Latinx women adds several layers to the discussion.

Women in the Political Landscape

To better understand the political experiences of women, there must first be a discussion of their roles and place within the current political landscape of the U.S. The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) (2019) noted that, as of January 2019, 127 women held seats in the U.S. Congress which means women hold less than a quarter of the 535 seats of the combined U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. The CAWP also noted that, of the women serving in Congress, only 47 were women of color, with 22 being Black, 13 being Latina, eight being Asian American/Pacific Islander, two being Native American, one being Middle Eastern/North African, and one being multiracial. Since March 4, 1789, 12,701 people have served in the U.S. Congress. Of that number, 358 were women, less than three percent of the total number. If, as Butler (2015) suggested, gender is political and there is power associated with gender, men have long held most of that power. Understanding political ambition and its link to power may better assist in our understanding of how power is claimed.

Fox and Lawless (2014) reviewed data from a 2011 Citizen Political Ambition Study to view family arrangements and interest in running for political office. Additionally, they

created a candidate pool from professions that yielded the highest proportion of male and female congressional and state legislative candidates and then disproportionately stratified it by sex to gain a roughly equal number of men and women. Surveys were sent to 9,000 respondents, and 1,925 men and 1,843 women replied. Fox and Lawless (2014) found that women were significantly less likely than men to consider running for office. Of the respondents who considered running for office, a significantly large percentage of the women stated that they would not consider running for office until after they were established professionally and often after starting a family. While the research by Fox and Lawless did not show that ambition for office is significantly different between women and men, it does highlight how women may choose to wait to pursue political goals. When speaking specifically about the development of women through a political lens, it is important to understand how an identity lens tends to focus the conversation. Black and Latinx female political identity development help to focus the current work.

To understand the political ambition gap between men and women, Schneider et al. (2016) examined perceptions of the role of politicians. For their research, they conducted three studies. The first study was a classroom study of 413-, 18- and 19-years old college-level student participants across a diverse group based on gender and ethnicity. The participants in the first study completed a measured goal affordance and rated communal versus power/independence based on a seven-point Likert scale. For the second study, Schneider et al. conducted an online student study of 327 participants across a diverse group centered on gender, age, and ethnicity. The participants in the second study completed a four-point to seven-point scale to measure political ambition. For the third study, the researchers conducted an online adult student study of 353 respondents who, on average, completed

college 16 years prior to the study. While the study was across a diverse group of participants, the majority were White, non-Hispanic, male. The respondents answered political-based questions that concerned task interest, conflict, and political ambition.

Schneider et al. (2016) found that the gender gap in political ambition impacted the way women achieved political equality. The researchers also found that political careers were seen as fulfilling power goals more than communal goals for participants. They noted that perceptions of political careers posed a problem for women because of their level of interest in job tasks associated with the pursuit of power and their desire to engage in conflict. Additionally, their research suggested that for women, the frames around the activities and goals of political leadership matter. Their research helps to highlight the gap in women's participation in political leadership and how support for the community drives political engagement.

When examining women in politics, Rhinehart (2020) noted that women lack the confidence that men have when it comes to their abilities and skills to run for political office. To understand how gender and political party affiliation influence lawmakers' behavior, Rhinehart used a field experiment design of state house members from three states with a potential sample of 445 legislators, of which 28% were women, all of whom were sent an email. States were selected based on professionalism, geographical region, and gender and partisan makeup. Her research was a 3×3 factorial design that included two random variables, partisan affiliation and gender of the email sender. An additional variable included the eight-word prime "Given there are so few women in government." With a response rate of 34.2%, which included 152 responses, Rhinehart coded the responses to the emails for respondents' gender, offer of help, gendered response, and length of response. She found that

legislators were more responsive to women who were of the same party affiliation, and the inclusion of the prime increased the rate of response. She found that Democrats were more likely to respond to women than men, and Republicans were equally likely to respond based on gender. Rhinehart noted that while men are willing to advise or mentor women in politics, additional research shows that women mentoring other women in politics is more meaningful. The challenge uncovered by her research was there was no data that showed women were better advocates for other women.

African American and Latinx Women Identity Politics

Often the challenge in reviewing and understanding identity politics is understanding that race along with gender is needed to give a fuller picture of the experiences of non-White women. Audre Lorde (1996) noted, "as White women ignore their built-in privilege of Whiteness and define *woman* in terms of their own experience alone, then women of color become 'other,' the outsider whose experience and tradition is too 'alien' to comprehend" (p. 286). This creation of "other" places a political divide between White women and women in Black and Brown communities and their involvement in politics. Brown (2014) noted that women's participation in politics goes back much further than the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which granted women the right to vote. She noted that because women were not a homogenous group, the political participation of non-White women lagged well behind that of the women's suffrage movement – Asian American women were excluded through naturalization means, Latina women banned in systematic ways, and African American women were effectively barred until the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Non-White women's participation in the political process then extends to their limited roles in

government. Brown examined national survey data from the 2004 Ethnic Political Study to compare the political participation of non-White women compared to that of White women.

The 2004 Ethnic Political Study randomly selected and interviewed 2,722 individuals. The survey included a cross-section of men and women who identified as White, African American, Latinx, and Asian. Women made of 1,416 of the respondents,   of which 603 self-identified as White, 334 identified as African American, 306 identified as Latina, and 174 identified as Asian American. Brown used an economic model, which posits that political participation is highly correlated with an individual's socioeconomic status. Brown then assessed the role of race-gender identities in political participation using dependent variables (voting, traditional forms of activity, and nontraditional group-based political), independent variable (gender and race), and control variables (education, income, age, nativity, political ideology, and language) to guide her work.

Brown (2014) discovered several counterintuitive findings that contradict the literature on non-White women's political participation. Brown noted that women with more education and income are likely to engage in resource-poor forms of political participation. Resource-rich White and Asian American women were more involved in nontraditional forms of political participation. Brown emphasized that only Black women linked fate as a significant factor in predicting political participation. Brown stated, "whether one agrees or strongly agrees that an individual's fate is tied to that of his or her racial group" (p. 323), as having played a significant factor in predicting political participation. She noted that the linked fate findings pointed to differences among women of color and that race and ethnicity do not influence individuals' views that fate is tied to that of her racial group.

It has been long believed that the formation of the African American female identity is grounded in a collective understanding between women (Brown et al., 2013; Garrin & Marcketti, 2018; Patterson, 2004). This collective understanding of the identity of women helps to serve as a connection that binds the individual to the group in specific ways (Garrin & Marcketti, 2018). When added to aspects of intersectionality, this collective identity serves to highlight areas of oppression and gives voice to resistance against political sameness (Cho et al., 2013; Garrin & Marcketti, 2018).

Davis (2017) conducted a web-based survey of 300 African American women aged 18 to 69 at a Midwestern university. The research was based on both dominant hegemonic and unique, culturally specific norms defining Black womanhood. Davis used identity theory to explore the content of existing measures that provided a comprehensive framework of African American femininity. She discovered the following feminine norms, which are consistent with African American femininity: spirituality, pride, self-reliance, care for children, thinness, domesticity, and modesty. Davis noted that intersectionality existed for the women that highlighted both Blackness, the experience of being a person of color, and African American womanness, the experience of being a woman in the African American community, as both equally important to identity. This intersection of identity is an acknowledgment of self-knowledge and connection to cultural communities (Davis, 2018; Garrin & Marcketti, 2018; Ogbar, 2019). It can be said then that the identity development of African American women is based on a sense of self through ethnic and gender lenses, along with cultural pride and being a member of the community. How that community is impacted politically is further influenced by the income of its members, and women of color in poverty have lower levels of political power.

Bernal (1998) noted that feminists of color recognized that gender alone does not determine the "allocation of power and the nature of any individual's identity, status, and circumstance" (p. 556) and that race, class, and sexual orientation were a part of this understanding. The identity politics of Latinas, like other non-White women, are not bound to gender alone. Montoya et al. (2000) stated, "considering the structure of political opportunities, Latinos are less likely to be asked to participate in politics because of socioeconomic status, language barriers, and gender" (p. 557). Montoya et al. (2000) sought to understand three questions: (a) With women less politically interest than men, what can be learned about the political socialization of Latina women? (b) Are the issues that call Latina women to action different than the issues that mobilize Latino men? (c) What organizations mobilize Latino men and where do Latino men gain civic skills?

In their review of available literature, Montoya et al. (2000) found for Latinas, the greatest predictors of political socialization were church attendance and involvement in organizations and school; in short, it is the aspects of the community that influence Latina engagement. The authors noted the call to action for Latina was similar to that of feminists and focused on the collective through a nonhierarchical political organization with loose forms of leadership that raised conscious awareness. Finally, on the question of organizations that mobilize Latino men and civic skills, Montoya et al. did not find significant data that captured this question and suggested that additional research is needed to understand the beliefs and behaviors of Latinos.

Politics and Poverty

Lorde (1996) viewed it as important to acknowledge differences among women. She stated, "refusing to recognize differences makes it impossible to see the different problems

and pitfall facing us as women" (p. 287). It is not possible, then, to fully understand the

political spaces of women without exploring the impact of poverty on Black and Latinx

women. The stories of poor, non-White girls and women begin with a history of how they are

observed in society and how poverty influences that conversation. By the end of the first

decade of the 2000s, the number of Americans living in poverty grew by 12.3 million to a

historic high of 46.2 million, meaning that over 15% of the nation's population lived below

the federal poverty line (Kneebone & Nadeau, 2015). Hildebrandt (2016) noted that people in

families with one working member for at least half the year and living below the poverty line

are referred to as the working poor. She also noted that in 2012 approximately 5.5 million

families, including 26.8% of female-headed families with children under 18, were among the

working poor (Hildebrandt, 2016).

Kneebone and Nadeau (2015) asserted that people in very poor neighborhoods faced

cascading disadvantages that included higher crime rates, poorer health, fewer educational

opportunities, and weaker job networks. In an effort to better understand the impact of

poverty across the U.S., Kneebone et al. (2016) used well-established data from the 1990 and

2000 censuses along with the 2010 American Community Survey to define geographic units

of analysis, data sources, and key measures of trends. Using the 100 largest metropolitan

areas in the U.S., the researchers designated primary city and suburban tracts and used

federal poverty thresholds to measure poverty and provide stable benchmarks. They found

that, as national poverty declined, the actual number of people living in extreme poverty,

living on less than $2.00 a day per person in the household, increased by more than two

million between 1990 and 2000. Additionally, they found that between 2005 and 2009, the

poverty rate increased from 12.4% to 13.5%, with more than half of this population living in

extreme poverty. Kneebone and Nadeau (2015) noted that by 2009 22.5% of the households living in extreme poverty were headed by women with children, and more than 83% were non-White. While the experiences of poor, young Black boys came to the forefront of American academia, the experiences of girls who were in the same classrooms were often only mentioned tangentially in the research. If women are not seen, they are not counted. If they are not counted, they lack political power.

Hildebrandt (2016) worked with a team to conduct a two-year study in two phases. In phase one of the study, chain referral techniques were targeted to recruit an ethnically and racially diverse group of 41 community-dwelling women. Four one-on-one interviews were conducted over the course of one year, and the participants completed a demographic questionnaire during each interview. In phase two of the study, 22 of the 41 women were given a fifth interview, one year after the fourth interview, and completed the demographic questionnaire. Along with the interviews and questionnaires, the researchers compared annual income, wages, number of people in each household, percent of women employed, and percent of women with less than a high school diploma. NVIVO software was used to facilitate the coding of the interview transcripts, and SPSS-PC was used for the demographic data review set with the .05 level of significance. The data analysis provided three major themes: (a) health challenges, (b) socioeconomic marginalization, and (c) the impact of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) policy. For context, TANF was created as part of the 1996 welfare reform legislation. TANF is a joint federal and state program and distributes cash to low-income families for child care, pregnancy prevention, and other work and educational support activities.

To further explain this study, it is necessary to highlight Hildebrandt's (2016) first and third themes (i.e., health challenges and the impact of the TANF). For health challenges, Hildebrandt (2016) noted that the "quantity and quality of their health care was marginal or substandard, even though they and their children had many health problems [one or more chronic health conditions] that required attention" (p. 161). Information about health care systems was limited and matched by low expectations of getting good health care. Hildebrandt (2016) found that, often, medical appointments were low priority and, most often, only the most serious symptoms received attention. In addition, the author noted that the TANF policies placed a priority on work, while the work readiness strategies were directed toward entry-level work skills. These strategies had little to no effect on women facing sizeable barriers to work and self-sufficiency. The TANF policies limited most support beyond that of high school and placed a five-year lifetime limit on the benefits. Women noted that sanctions incurred through the TANF caused unplanned disruptions in benefits and even led to an increase in homeless and other insecurities. While themes one and three have a clear impact on poverty in women, the most significant to the current research is Hildebrandt's second theme (i.e., socioeconomic marginalization) because it includes poverty, education, and social support.

Hildebrandt (2016) noted that the research "illustrated many of the barriers to obtaining and keeping self-sustaining employment" (p. 161). Eighty-two percent of the 22 women interviewed had annual incomes that were below the federal poverty level. Fifty percent of the women had annual incomes that were below 50% of poverty, placing them in deep poverty, a level where the basic health and normative development of children are at risk. Five of the 22 women in the study who had jobs had a mean hourly wage of $8.18 per

hour. Even when working, the women were dependent on income from other sources, including prostitution. For education and work skills, the TANF recipients in the study could pursue high school or equivalency diploma education. Hours for education were credited toward the number of job training or work hours required to stay eligible for the TANF. For the women in the study, high school education did not result in getting better jobs than they had in the past. The entry-level training approved through the TANF did not lead to financially self-sustaining work with health or sick leave benefits. The current research sought to better understand women, many of who may come from the experiences highlighted in Hildebrandt's work, who have made the often difficult decision to attend college to move beyond entry-level and lower wages jobs.

The lack of political space for low-SES women is emphasized by Kerby (2012), who noted that African American and Latina women experienced lower median weekly earnings, higher rates of poverty, and greater levels of employment than White, non-Hispanic women. Along with being lower-wage earners, she noted that Black and Latina women were unemployed at more disproportionate rates than White women. Kerby stated that "if these trends [in employment] continue, women of color will be left behind and their families and communities will be adversely affected, especially as more women become breadwinners— earning either as much or more than their husbands—in their households" (para. 7). Kerby also noted that women of color had different workforce and political experiences along with different health disparities and educational attainment than White women. She stated that the perspective of these non-White women must be part of the national discourse, particularly in relation to their families and communities. Given this trajectory, the college attendance patterns of Black and Brown women are in need of exploring.

The Experience of Women in College

A challenge with the current research topic was the lack of research that specifically speaks to the experiences of women as they transition to college. The literature that focused on female adult learners was even more limited. To mitigate this lack of literature and to better understand adult female college students, it was important to separate the characteristics of these students into four areas. These characteristics include (a) the experience of female students, (b) being first-generation students, (c) being adult learners, and (d) systems that support the success of women.

The Experience of non-White Female Students

Research on the college experience of African American women and Latinas that does not include or blend the African American male or Latino college student with the African American female or Latina college is limited. This limitation in research shows a clear need for additional research on these topics that are female-centric. To provide an understanding of the African American female college experience, I used an ethnographic study of academic success by Fordham (1993); the meta-ethnographic review of the literature completed by Neal-Jackson (2018); a grounded theory study by Du et al. (2016); and descriptive and multivariate techniques within a quantitative study completed by Farmer et al. (2016). To provide context for the Latina college experience to the current research, I employed post-feminist research by Frederick et al. (2020); a single participant case study conducted by Guerra et al. (2019); and ground theory research with a social construction paradigm conducted by Storlie et al. (2016). Together these articles provide some details about the experiences of African American women and Latinas and how they experience being college students.

African American Students

To understand how gender impacted student success Fordham, (1993) used data from an ethnographic study of academic success in an urban high school to explore how the definition of femaleness that is based on White middle-class womanhood forces African-American females to resist consuming images that declare their "nothingness." The work noted how "loudness" became a metaphor for how African American women resisted the embodiment of "nothingness" and reflected the systematic process used to subvert the backlash of the accepted definition of femaleness and its impact on academic success. Fordham also documented how not recognizing the gender diversity of the Washington DC school studied negated the success of African American female students.

Fordham (1993) took a two-stage approach to the study. For the first year of the study, she identified 33 students in the 11th grade to serve as key informants. These 33 students were followed for a year and were interviewed, observed, and analyzed. The students in this group were representative of the student population and included both male and female students as well as students who were both high and low academic achievers. Fordham also interviewed and observed the students' parents, teachers, and school officials. In the second year of the study, Fordham conducted a situ survey of 600 in grades nine through twelve. For the 1993 study, Fordham used data from 12 of the high-achieving and 12 of the low achieving students from a magnet school in the Washington DC area. Six students in each achievement group were male, and six were female.

Fordham (1993) found that African American female students were both the most successful and least visible students at the school. She noted that these female students were "passing" for someone they were not – White American female and, more specifically, White

American male. This socialization to silence was key to their success in that it concealed their female voices. Fordham noted, "Black females pay an inordinate price for academic success: it leads to an "ignorance of connections," an uncertain "fork in the road" (1993, p. 23). Socialization to silence also was distressing to these African American female students because it isolated and alienated Black girls from more popular yet underachieving female classmates. Fordham noted that these high-achieving Black females often wondered why there was not more support from their mothers and female teachers. Fordham noted:

> The central questions haunting this entire analysis and smoldering in the lives of all African-American females are the following: Is gender diversity something to celebrate? Should we seek its fragmentation? If so, how? Should our goal be to transform "those loud Black girls"? Should success for African-American women be so expensive? Finally, should the African-American female seek to reconstruct her life to become successful, pawning her identity as a "loud Black girl" for an identity in which she is the "doubly-refracted [African-American] Other"? p. 24

Neal-Jackson (2018) noted that more than two decades of educational research placed much of the focus on men of color, with a primary focus on the experiences of young, Black men. She emphasized this point by highlighting the $200 million used to support programs for young men, and "less than 1 million philanthropic dollars have been spent to support the educational improvement of Black and Brown girls and women" (p. 509). Perhaps, as Neal-Jackson (2018) noted, the lack of research can be attributed to research that touts the universal resilience of women and girls. However, it was not the resilience of women and girls that was in question. It was the oversimplification of the experiences of women that should be examined. The author completed a meta-ethnographic review of the literature to understand how the research gives voice to the experiences of young, Black women within public schools given their racial and gender identities. The meta-ethnography allowed her to

reimagine original research within 60 existing studies and privileged participant voices in a critical race theory framework.

Neal-Jackson (2018) identified three primary themes within the data: (a) academic orientations and expectations, (b) Black (feminine) identity performance, and (c) schooling opportunities. In the theme of academic orientations and expectations, Neal-Jackson noted that school officials often stated that Black, female students had academic abilities "average or slightly below average when compared to other students" (p. 515), but, in fact, many of the girls had grades at or above their White, male peers, who were considered the highest achievers in each class. Moreover, Neal-Jackson cited an example of one girl from a previous study who the teacher stated was average but expressed that the girl helps other students who did not understand the course work. Such an action reflects the skills of someone who has a greater understanding of the material. So much so that she is a resource to her peers. Neal-Jackson noted that, as school officials continue to have the perception that Black girls are lower achievers, they also lower the expectations for these girls. Neal-Jackson only identified a small minority of works where school officials noted the academic abilities of Black female students.

In the area of academic expectations, Black female students often highlighted the lack of or lower expectations set by school officials and highlighted their commitments to their own successes. These female students worked hard to better themselves, their families, and their communities. Still, their Black feminine identity played a crucial role in their experiences.

The second theme pointed out by Neal-Jackson (2018) was how gender is perceived among Black female students. The author noted that the qualities of acceptable femininity

seem to be challenged by these students. Even the term 'loud' has several subjective meanings, such as a need to be more ladylike, hyper/heightened visibility, and a wholly inadequate ability to be perceived as feminine. This unwarranted perception of Black, female students is also highlighted in research that reflected Black female students' attempts at participating as a desire to take over the class or assume authority over others (Neal-Jackson, 2018).

The third area of note is how teachers' perceptions of Black female student femininity are defined through the lens of social and sexual maturity. Neal-Jackson (2018) noted that teachers found that Black girls were preoccupied with games that emphasized adult roles, such as cooking, grooming hair, makeup, and preparing for dates with imaginary boyfriends. According to Neal-Jackson, "given that innocence is a privilege largely unavailable to the girls as Black children, these teachers never considered their games to be harmless play" (p. 524). It was clear to Neal-Jackson that Black female students felt that they were perceived as being loud, unladylike, troublemakers, and, in some situations, demonstrating some of the behaviors imposed upon them. Yet, Neal-Jackson noted that a constant in past research has been that Black female students had to change significant aspects of themselves to access resources made readily available to their peers. This point became more evident in Neal-Jackson's discussion of schooling opportunities.

Neal-Jackson (2018) noted that, while educational opportunities were at the core of Black female students' concerns, school officials did not speak directly to the issues. Those officials who did speak of educational opportunities spoke of them globally in an equal opportunity narrative and collectively saw missed opportunities as a result of the students' own doings (Neal-Jackson, 2018). Neal-Jackson noted that institutional structures and

teacher pedagogy were only mentioned in two of the 60 studies reviewed. While there was an acknowledgment of limited educational opportunities for Black female students, most school officials focused those limits outwardly toward the student and not internally on the processes and the educational environment. When Black female students discussed issues of educational opportunities, most attributed race as a factor, and some spoke specifically to the intersection of race and gender (Neal-Jackson, 2018). It is important to note that across the student narrative was the idea that teachers seldom had the capacity to "teach using Black culture, let alone teach them about Black culture" (Neal-Jackson, 2018, p. 533). The research by Neal-Jackson highlighted the success of some Black, female students despite many challenges. However, the narrative in her research shows that overwhelming success that is said to exist among Black female students is misleading when 37% do not graduate from high school and, of those students who do, less than a third enroll in colleges or universities.

To explore how African American female student perceived their experience of online collaborative learning, Du et al. (2016) followed the forms of a ground theory because it allowed for inductive and deductive components. Grounded theory also allowed the researchers the ability to not propose a formal hypothesis for testing but rather to develop "general exploratory questions based on existing literature in online collaborative learning" (Du et al., 2016, p. 951). The participants for the study were nine African American female graduate students enrolled in an online instructional design course at a public university in the South-eastern United States. There were 28 students with diverse cultural backgrounds enrolled in the course that was conducted online. Six of the eight graduate students who participated in the study attended college part-time, and two attended full-time. All eight participants were single, and eight of the participants were single mothers.

Du et al. (2016) used the general exploratory questions approach in semi-structured interviews as an attempt to ensure the data collected would reflect the experiences of African American women and get closer to the voiced experience of the participants. Observations on students' conversations and posts in chat rooms and discussion boards were also conducted. Data gathered from participants were coded through the constant comparative method assisted by NVivo. The researchers individually coded and analyzed the data before the team negotiated themes based on interview transcripts, related conversations, and documents collected. Data were compared with existing data. Du et al. confirmed, revised, or discounted themes as they made themselves known. Du et al. noted three themes that made themselves known: peer support as a give-and-take process with a sense of fairness; group member role as a formation of identity; and frustration as a common response to differing levels of peer participation and interactions (2016).

Du et al. (2016) stated that peer support as a give-and-take process with a sense of fairness was derived from African American female students' awareness of the prominence of peer support online, but that they also noted a need for fairness across and among group members. The researchers found that group member role as a formation of identity as it pertained to the experience of African American women was viewed as essential along with a positive group identity. The theme of frustration as a common response to differing levels of peer participation and interactions was expressed through frustration with unannounced absences of group members and the level of group discussion contribution. Du et al. (2016) noted that understanding the dynamics that group interaction would assist with the development of intervention plans.

To examine pre-college characteristics that help shape the college experience of Black American female students with the institutional and peer environment, Farmer et al. (2016) conducted a descriptive and multivariate quantitative research study that examined secondary data from one of the Historically Black College and Universities (HBCU) in the southern region of the United States. Data for the study were compiled by the HBCU on the cohort of Black female students who enrolled in Fall 2005 as degree-seeking students for the first time. The data included information on 785 Black female students. The research focused on two dependent criterion variables: retention and graduation. Retention was defined at Fall 2005 to Fall 2006 reenrollment. Graduation was based on the national standard of six years. Farmer et al. (2016) noted both pre-college and college independent variables and stated:

> The independent (predictor) pre-college variables employed in this study were age, high school grade point average (GPA), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), American College Test (ACT) score, Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate (IB) credits. The independent college variables were remedial courses taken in mathematics, reading, and English (Developmental Mathematics I and II, Developmental Reading I and II and Writing I and II); hours attempted in year one of college; hours earned in year one of college; cumulative GPA year one of college; cumulative GPA year 4 of college; family income; and student dependency status as determined by the Free Application for Student Financial Aid (FAFSA). (p. 13)

Farmer et al. (2016) found that between 2004 and 2013, the six-year graduation rates for first-time college students ranged from 39%-46%. The researchers noted that between 2011 and 2023, the performance indicator showed less significant variability and ranged between 40%-41%. Descriptive and multivariate techniques were used to compute for all variables, pre-college and college. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to explore the relationship between the two dependent criterion variables (retention and graduation) and all the independent pre-college and college-level variables. Several significant relationships between select pre-college and college-level independent variables and first-year retention

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were revealed that family income, enrollment in developmental math, hours attempted in year one, hours earned in year one, and cumulative GPAs in year one were considered significantly related to first-year retention and ranged from $r(785)=-.075$, $p=.036$ to $r(785)=.517$, $p<.00$ (Farmer et al., 2016). Similarly, Framer et al. found significant relationships between select pre-college and college-level independent variables and six-year graduation rates, including ACT score, SAT score, high school GPA, family income, hours attempted in year one, hours earned in year one, cumulative GPA year one, cumulative GPA year four, and dependency status. Positive correlations among these variables ranged from $r(680)=.017$, $p=.001$ to $r(471)=.317$, $p<.001$.

Logic regression was used to assess whether the predictor variables significantly predicted whether Black American females would graduate within six years of initial enrollment (Farmer et al., 2016). The researchers noted the odds ratio suggested that six-year graduation is increasing greater for Black American females when high school GPA, GPA year one in college, and GPA year four in college increase. Farmer et al. also noted that SAT and ACT scores were not good predictors of college success of the participants in the study and that the number of credits attempted and earned along with overall GPA were better predictors for retention and success. Ultimately, the researchers noted that while African American females have higher graduation rates than African American male students, they are not at the same level as other female students.

Latina Students

Frederick et al. (2020) used a post-feminist approach to narrative inquiry to examine how young women employed gendered discourses as the navigated male-dominated profession in fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The

researchers selected 16 first-year Hispanic women students who participated in a STEM program at a predominately White serving university that prepared college students for graduate school and eventual place in a STEM research career. Thirteen of the participants were 18, two were 19, 14 were U.S. citizens, two were permanent residents, and six were first-generation students. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews of each participant that lasted 60 minutes to 150 minutes, with the average interview being 90 minutes. The interviews were conducted in a private office by two researchers who used an interview guide and probed about certain topics as they emerged (Frederick et al., 2020, p. 652). The interviews were transcribed and coding using NVivo. Frederick et al. (2020) stated the codes and themes relate to how "the students made sense of gender disparities in STEM; they are post-feminist narratives, feminist narratives that challenge sexism, and narratives that downplay inequality" (p. 652). The researchers also examined the ways in which students discussed experiences related to their racial/ethnic identities. The two overarching themes noted were post-feminist narratives and challenging blatant sexism.

For post-feminist narratives, Frederick et al. (2020) found that the topic of gender discrimination came up most often when the participants were specifically asked if they felt out of place with the STEM major due to their gender or racial/ethnic identity. The researcher noted that participants' answers were based on a post-feminist framework that was based on a model of individual empowerment and an assumption of equal opportunity. Frederick et al. stated that participants did employ post-feminism as a form of resistant capital against blatant sexism that was experienced from family members and male students within their area of STEM. Frederick et al. also noted that some participants "found currency in feminism to challenge such instances" (2020, p. 654). Through the examination of gendered lenses,

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Frederick et al. (2020) noted that post-feminism's emphasis on being strong women and not being victims left most participants hesitant to express their anger or hurt when they "experienced potentially damaging comments or actions from others" (p. 659).

To examine the impact of providing psychosocial support to a teacher candidate, Guerra et al. (2019) conducted a single participant case study using a modified success case study methodology. The researchers used the problem-solving LIBRE Model as a framework for the study. The LIBRE Model refers to prompting steps described by Guerra et al. as:

> L – Listen and list – invites the participant to reflect and share socially situated worldviews.
> I – Identify a concern – invites the participant to prioritize from among the concerns listed in the prior step.
> B – Brainstorming – provides an opportunity for the participant to express the creative and divergent possible solutions to the identified problem.
> R – Reality testing – provides an opportunity for the participant to examine the generated list of possibilities and to determine actionable options.
> E – Encourage – invites the participant to consider personal accountability with self-determined indicators of progress. (p. 410)

The LIBRE Model framework focused on the participant's response to how she processed daily challenges. The participant, Mari, was selected because her educational pathway and corresponding trajectory were representative of the researchers who conducted the study. Mari was a live-at-home, 25-year-old Mexican American Latina, first-generation college student, in the final year of her undergraduate degree, from a low-income family, born and raised in the United States, and attended a community college before she transferred to a university to complete her degree in teacher education. Guerra et al. also noted that Mari was the eldest of two daughters, had a child with her boyfriend, was encouraged to quit school and take care of her child by her mother, and was encouraged to complete her degree by her father.

Guerra et al. (2019) explored social-cognitive, cultural, and contextual challenges through three structured problem-solving sessions that were recorded, transcribed, and shared with all three researchers. The counseling sessions, led by a LIBRE-trained counselor of the research team, were designed to examine what was identified, what was identified, conditions, and sense-of-self, and planning for resolution. The advantage of the single case study was that it allowed Guerra et al. a "more in-depth individual exploration rather than aggregated information across individuals" (2019 p. 411). Additionally, the single case study approach was designed to address differences over time using only one participant. The data gathered through the sessions were analyzed using a narrative analysis ethnographic approach. The researchers completed a rater calibration that showed 95% agreement across the group before each complete a review of the transcript data. Their approach included thematic analysis, discourse analysis, phenomenology, and ground theory to develop a sense of the whole and placed the individual in the culture of birth, pursuing cultural competence in higher education, and the experience in a place and time.

Participant responses to the LIBRE Model prompts were tabulated and analyzed, specificity and action-oriented responses were tracked to identify investment, problems, and problem-solving themes. The final aspect of inquiry was for the Guerra et al. (2019) to consider the participant's self-identified key challenges and means of resolution that reflected "the intent to understand the perceived position(s) and relationship(s) between the individual and their experience of life (phenomena) situated in a university setting" (p. 413).

The individual analyses were discussed and consolidated into a final consensus document regarding matters of interpretation, saliency, and significance. Guerra et al. (2019) identified three themes from their analysis: timidity, awakening, and action plans. Timidity

was described as the participant's investment in understanding ongoing, persistent, and relatively durable emotional states like feeling nervous and stress (p. 413). Awaking was defined by the participant's willingness to be more specific about the source of her distress and internal conflict (p. 415). Actions and plans occurred with the participant realized she, herself was the primary source for problem-solving and determiner of her success. The researchers note that the successful Latina provided an example of how to navigate the cultural conflict between home and school.

To understand the values and life-role salience that affect the career development of Latina first-generation college students, Storlie et al. (2016) conducted research based on qualitative grounded theory and social constructivist paradigm. The research provided "a voice for Latina first-generation students to explore and verbalize their understanding and experiences" (Storlie et al., 2016, p. 307). The researchers used purposive sampling to recruit participants from a Latino/a student organization at a predominately Caucasian college. Participants met two criteria to participate self-identify as Latina and were the first in their family to attend college. The initial pool of participants included 12 students, two participates were excluded because at least one parent had completed college. The final group of participants included 10 Latinas; two were graduate, and eight were undergraduate students who ranged in age from 20 to 45, and the Latino ethnicities were Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Ecuadorian.

Storlie et al. (2016) used inductive strategies found in grounded theory to understand the underlying cause for participants' beliefs and behavior in the context of the academic setting. The goal was to move from the beginning of understanding to a more complex understanding. Toward the end of the process, the researchers used deductive strategies to

address the relationship between concepts. The grounded theory for the study was "developed and centered on the experiences of the participants (Storlie et al., 2016, p. 307). A semiformal interviews process was used by a member of the research team to guide the interview content and allow for the greatest flexibility for the participant to respond (Storlie et al., 2016). Each interview lasted an average of one hour and consisted of nine questions that "explored life roles, balancing life roles and college, the cultural impact on life roles, supports and challenges in the academic environment, ideal careers and values, the impact of family and community on career-related values, and the barriers of being a Latina in college" (Storlie et al., 2016, p. 308). A large amount of data was organized and coded with the support of NVivo. The researchers first identified patterns and themes through an open coding process. Selective coding was completed on all data that was collected. As a final aspect of the coding process, Storlie et al. (2016) conducted axial coding across all materials along with the constant comparative method, and codes were grouped into categories and for a comprehensive explanation of "the impact that cultural values and life roles had on first-generation Latina students' career path" (p. 309). Two overarching themes that were identified captured how the participants' values and life-role salience affected career development: fitting in and redefining Latina career pathways.

Storlie et al. (2016) that by reflecting on their culture, values, and life roles, and career development, participants focused on their struggles fitting in around three areas: fitting in the family; fitting in the college environment; and being Latina enough. The idea of fitting in with family, focused on being the first in the family to attend college and navigating career paths in the unfamiliar space of higher education. The researchers found that fitting in the college environment was centered on the idea of not being welcomed by the college

while they worked to achieve their academic dream. Being Latina enough was focused on the idea of how the participants' identities were judged by how as Latinas, they presented themselves based on physical characteristics. The second theme Storlie et al. (2016) noted, redefining Latina career pathways, was centered on preparation and the responsibility to give back. Preparation included "obtaining resources outside of the family, financing college, prioritizing classes and scheduling, and employment" (Storlie et al., 2016, p. 311). Responsibility to give back, which can be traced to Latina feminist theory, was the participants' desire to make the most of the privilege of getting a degree, a desire to travel and give back to their families and communities. Storlie et al. noted, "Universities, colleges, and high schools need to adjust career services to address the gap in knowledge for Latina students and their families" (2016, p. 314).

First-Generation Students

The definition for first-generation college students that was presented by Barry et al. (2009) stated, "students who are in the first-generation of their family to attend a four-year institution of higher education" (p. 56). For the current research study, this definition includes two-year institutions of higher education as well. Consistency in this definition allows a framework for speaking to the challenges of first-generation students and helps to encompass students who attend community colleges.

The experiences of first-generation students have been highlighted by Kurotsuchi-Inkelas (2007), who pointed out that first-generation college students are ''educational pioneers...they are the first, or one of the first, in their families to pursue postsecondary education" (p. 404). Additionally, Chen and Carroll (2005) found that first-generation students are less likely than other students to attend college within eight years after high

school. With extended time away from an educational setting, there comes the added challenge that many first-generation students lack the academic preparation for higher education and a need for remedial assistance to do college-level work (Chen & Carroll, 2005).

The first hurdle for many first-generation students can be seen in their preparedness. The research by Chen and Carroll (2005) showed that many first-generation students needed remedial help, and 55% of first-generation students studied took remedial courses during their college years, compared with 27% of non-first-generation students whose parents held bachelors or advanced degrees. It is important to note that an unexpected addition to the preparedness of students is language barriers. Research has shown that first-generation students, whether native or foreign-born, display a variety of language and communication problems that limit their career opportunities and often result in stereotyping (Francis & Miller, 2008). This lack of language proficiency is reflected in the students' academic preparedness skills. Kurotsuchi-Inkelas (2007) found that first-generation college students were less prepared academically and had lower reading, math, and critical thinking skills. In addition, they were more likely to have attended high schools with coursework that was less rigorous than students who had family members who attended college.

Many first-generation students described their intense personal experiences associated with becoming students in college as emotional and highlighted by social and academic challenges (Francis & Miller, 2008). These challenges can, in turn, impact students' successful transitions to college. Often, first-generation adult learners start on unequal footing, especially when compared to their non-first-generation peers. These students are unprepared or underprepared and often lack resources that might help to bring understanding

to the idea of being college students; a lack of understanding that can increase students'

stressors. "Individuals faced with stressful life events who also feel socially isolated and

embarrassed, or feel that they lack support, typically also lack opportunities to disclose and

discuss stressful events" (Barry et al., 2009, p. 57). Through this disclosure, understanding

and help is obtained; first-generation students may find limited opportunities to disclose

details of stressful life events, which may manifest in long- and short-term health problems

and academic difficulties (Barry et al., 2009). In this new culture of existence, it is essential

to be reminded that first-generation students live in the margins. There is a sense that the

students do not want to break with the past but are not fully accepted into the new culture

(Hands & Payne, 2008). The current research study has a primary focus on community

college students and, while the literature is not as robust for this population of students, the

literature that concerns community college students must be part of the fuller conversation.

An idea exists that first-generation college students, specifically those students who

attend community colleges, must be supported by a system that is prepared to serve them. It

is the responsibility, at least in part, of the institutions to create and develop systems that

allow first-generation college students greater guided access to support services (Shumaker

& Wood, 2016; Wood & Palmer, 2015).

Shumaker and Wood (2016) used data from the Community College Success

Measure (CCSM) (i.e., an institutional level needs assessment tool used by community

colleges) to examine factors impacting the success of historically underrepresented and

underserved students, particularly men of color, to compare how first-generation college

students and non-first-generation college students have accessed services available at their

institutions. The instrument was randomly distributed to 17,000 men across 68 community

colleges. The researchers then used an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), controlled for covariates, used custom models to test the homogeneity of the slopes assumption, and generated models for each factor variable in the study (Shumaker & Wood, 2016). They (2006) found that first-generation college students used institutionally offered services at the same rate as non-first-generation college students, "yet experience[d] disparate benefits from the services" (Shumaker & Wood, 2016, p. 16). It is, then, the onus of community college leaders to better understand how to support first-generation college students and ensure that access and efficacy are aligned. While the research by Shumaker and Wood (2016) highlighted some of the challenges faced by first-generation college students, specifically those students who are also men of color, it also helped to validate the sheer lack of data and research pertaining to female, first-generation college students.

Sy et al. (2012) surveyed 339 diverse first-generation and non-first-generation female students to explore the influence of parental support during the transition to college. Sy et al. (2012) found that the level of parental, emotional support among first-generation female students was much lower than that of continuing-generation female students. Influences of family relationships are also echoed by Smith (2008), who discussed how families influence college choices and how poverty and race impact even the most well-meaning parents. A consistent message from family and friends that college is important, but an apparent lack of how to convey that message to daughters also exists (Sy et al., 2012; Smith, 2008). The lack of clear language from friends and family that supports students' successes is at the core of college choice and impacts when and how female students transition to college. The inability to access these support systems is exasperated by economic issues and being an adult learner.

Adult Learners

Recent articles in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* point to a need to understand and support adult learners. These nontraditional adult students turn to colleges and universities to improve or gain skills, receive certifications or diplomas, or explore different career paths. It is essential that colleges and universities understand and have resources to support these students, no matter the reasons they begin their college journeys. To understand how institutional factors influence adult student persistence, Capps (2012) viewed adult students who had two or more of the following characteristics: aged 25 and older, working full-time, enrolled part-time, raising children, returning to school after time away, and/or supporting themselves financially. Capps only selected students who had completed at least three semesters of college to demonstrate the persistence of the participants. Of the 12 students who participated in the study, two were men, and 10 were women. Of the participants, four were Latina, one was Korean, one was Native American, and six were White. Capp does not report ethnicity by gender. For the study, the participants completed a demographic survey and four semi-structured interviews. The interviews focused on their experiences in college, the personal and institutional influences that impacted their persistence, and the student's self-reported explanations for their persistence.

Capps (2012) noted that, while the participants did not credit their persistence to institutional factors, they frequently mentioned teachers and advisors who deeply impacted their decisions during college. Additionally, Capps noted that the most meaningful connections identified by the students were with instructors on campus. This meaningful connection was also reflected in the students' experiences working with advisors who assisted them in navigating institutional red tape. Capps made several suggestions based on her research and noted that learning communities that combined developmental education

courses with college-level content had the potential to decrease time to degree and increase persistence. Capps also noted that student-centered scheduling that takes the adult learner into consideration was better equipped to support students who may need courses that occur when the students are available. The results also showed that faculty members need to know their students and be willing to validate students by using their names, encourage them to use campus resources, listen to their concerns, and state that the students can learn the course materials. Finally, Capps noted the importance of faculty-based advising and early alert systems that interrupt the process before the students reach a point where success becomes almost impossible. It is through these processes that community colleges can become more aware of students' needs and develop policies and practices that are meant to specifically support adult learners.

Adult learners are identified as being nontraditional students who do not fit the typical profile of the 18 to 22-year-old, full-time undergraduate (Kohler-Giancola & Munz, 2008). Adult learners may attend either a two-year college or a four-year university, but Philibert et al. (2008) noted that the higher the number of nontraditional characteristics students possess, the more likely they will choose a community college. Additionally, 53% of community college students are over the age of 23, and 35% are age 30 or older (Horn & Nevill, 2006). Research by Philibert et al. (2008) showed that, despite the increase in nontraditional students in U.S. institutions of higher education, most academic programs continue to be built upon traditional student models. To adequately meet the needs of the growing number of adult learners, colleges and universities must begin to realize that nontraditional students' needs may be entirely different from the needs fulfilled by programs provided by some educational institutions (Philibert et al., 2008).

Research by Kohler-Giancola and Munz (2008) suggested that adult learners, first-generation students are more likely to be independent, have work experience, and interact with a variety of people and cultures. With these experiences comes a better understanding of the value of an education (Kohler-Gincola & Munz 2008) and, because these students are so different than traditional students, the sense of being may be at war with the need for a sense of belonging (Collier & Morgan, 2008). Kashworm (2010) spoke of adult learners at research universities and stated that the individual's identity was the basis for most of the individual's actions. Kashworm noted that adult learners' decisions and expectations were grounded in ideas based on their experiences, and as these adult learners participated in educational environments, they struggled to find their places in systems based on traditional-aged students. In environments like community colleges, where the number of adult learners continues to grow, it is critical that institutions understand the needs of these students and appropriate resources and people to explore their needs. When providing resources that support women, there must be a clearer understanding of female students and their needs.

Systems that Support the Successes of Women

One of the challenges in understanding the experiences of female adult learners and their transitions to college is the manners in which adult learners are studied. Lin (2016) noted that research on the barriers for female adult learners is in the developmental stage, and much of the research focuses on adult learners without regard to gender. The blending of genders within the research assumes that many of the challenges faced by adult learners are global and not experienced differently by gender. Lin (2016) conducted a search of the literature, within the data parameters of 1970 to 2015, using several online databases that included peer-reviewed and full-text manuscripts; subjects identified in the manuscripts were

"female adult students or learners; female, nontraditional students or learners; and adult students or learners" (p. 120); programs were certificate or degree-seeking; and books and literature reviews were incorporated in the search.

Lin's research identified 20 articles over 45 years of research specifically related to female, adult learners and found that female students often have a more significant number of roles to play, such as mothers, spouses/partners, employees, and community members, and must work to balance their multiple roles with their student role. Female adult learners must be prepared to be many things at once (Alfred & Nanton, 2009; Lin, 2016; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Próspero, 2007), and higher education leaders have not consistently found ways to support female students in their successes. As such, they must evolve to prepare to support these female students.

To explore the experiences of nontraditional African American female undergraduate students at a Hispanic serving institution in the Southwest, Bonner et al. (2014) conducted a grounded theory study of 10 students in this population, ranging from ages 21 to 45. They asked the students to complete an eight-question demographic questionnaire, and each participant completed an interview that lasted between one to one and a half hours. The interviews provided the researchers with detailed accounts of the women's experiences.

Bonner et al. (2014) identified five categories as themes by which to develop a framework to report their findings: (a) identifying viable support structures, (b) navigating bureaucratic waters, (c) negotiating life circumstances, (d) adapting to the contextual environment, and (e) affirming the need to affiliate. In the area of identifying viable support structures, Bonner et al. observed that the participants cited many of the same sources related to support (e.g., family, mental health professionals, campus-based organizations, peers,

sororities, professors, university counselors), but that the access to this support varied based on students' experiences. When the students spoke of navigating the bureaucratic waters, Bonner et al. found this process to be the critical first step needed to achieve success.

As stated, many times throughout the research, negotiating life circumstances was a significant aspect of the women's experiences. In fact, Bonner et al. (2014) noted that pregnancies, divorce, debt, poverty, abuse in the military, and single parenthood were among the many difficulties these women faced and provided reasons why female students may need to postpone or interrupt their educational experiences. Bonner et al. also found that, as these women worked to adapt to the contextual environment of the university setting, they also struggled to keep up with institutional changes beyond their control.

Finally, Bonner et al. (2014) noted that an aspect of the women's experiences was a need to be affiliated with or connected to the institution. The researchers found that much of this affiliation occurred through campus-based organizations, specifically those organizations that were multicultural or Greek-lettered. Bonner et al. noted a constant challenge with these affiliations was the lack of maturity on the part of the traditional-aged members.

While Bonner et al. (2014) identified themes related to institutional support of participants, Goldrick-Rab (2010) documented that, for much of the latter half of the 20th century, a particular route to college, specifically community colleges, for women in poverty with children was through the welfare system. Goldrick-Rab reviewed programs that allowed some welfare recipients to receive free tuition and childcare so that they might attend college. Goldrick-Rab (2010) remarked:

> Relative to other undergraduates, students attending the nation's two-year, public colleges come from a broader range of family backgrounds. For example, 40% of undergraduates enrolled at community colleges in 2008 were non-White, 38% came from families where neither parent was educated

beyond high school, and 56% were women (in comparison, the corresponding figures for students at public 4-year institutions are 33%, 25%, and 53%). (p. 451)

This information is significant to the current research study because it highlights the role that community colleges play in educating women. Adult learners are at a higher risk of juggling enrollment with work and family and more likely to have part-time college enrollment. Research by Jacobs and King (2002) suggested that women, aged 25 and older, attending college, particularly women attending college part-time, may also experience life events, such as marriage, childbirth, or divorce, which compete with schooling and accounts for the observed lower rates of completion among older students.

This section of the literature review spoke to the experiences of African American and Latinx women in college and included research on how they navigate spaces based on their identity. This is slightly expanded through discussion of African American and Latinx women first-generation, their experiences as adult learners, and the roles the institutions should play to assist them to achieve their academic goals. The research on these topics is limited, and often when speaking of the college experiences of African American and Latinx women, it is in the context of all African American and Latinx students. To move toward a greater understanding of the experiences of women in college there must be a broader view of their experiences through the lens of intersectionality and antiracism (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991).

The Success of Women

The current research was designed to give a much-needed voice to the experiences of women of color as they navigate their college experiences as nontraditional students. However, this research would be incomplete without recognizing the successes achieved by

women of color as well as a detailed description of how these successes were achieved. A broad database search of EBSCOhost of scholarly peer-reviewed journals was used for the terms "success strategies African American women" which resulted in only 52 articles between 1995 and 2020. Of the 52 articles, 25 were related to African American women's health issues which meant that during the last quarter-century only 27 scholarly articles focused on the success of African American women. When the terms were changed to "success strategies Latina Chicana" the search results were only 20 non-medical related articles during the same 25-year period. These searches speak to a clear lack of African American and Latinx female voices that exist in relation to success. Be reminded, the lack of research does not negate the many successes that these women have achieved.

For African American and Latinx women to succeed conversations and research about their success and why they succeed must be more prevalent. Ramos and Yi (2020) found that it was critically important for administrators and educators to understand the "experiences of women of color and recognize the impact these experiences have on their persistence and success in college" (p. 136).

Ramos and Yi (2020) conducted a study based on data from an unpublished qualitative study concerning the academic aspirations of 11 doctoral women of color from the Mountain region of the United States and included participants who self-identified as one or more of the following: African American, Latina American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Native American. Their study highlighted the experiences of doctoral women of color encountered with racism and sexism in doctoral programs to understand how women "responded to and over overcame racist and sexist incidents" (p. 142). The researchers collected data through semi-structured 60 to 90 minute in-person interviews.

Ramos and Yi (2020) separated their experiences with racism into covert messages, overt messages, and material and physical manifestations. In covert messages, they noted they were seeming innocuous messages with low academic expectations and tokenism. Overt messages were directly and explicitly racist or sexist and included being called offensive racially charged names and expectations created from traditional gender roles. Material and physical manifestations included both covert and overt messages that shaped daily lives and resulted in discrimination against women of color. Being the most complex, material, and physical manifestations resulted in the need for women of color to wear specific clothing to avoid harassment or an expectation to research communities based on identity without compensation.

Defensive strategies were used when participants needed to "preserve the self" (Ramos & Yi, 2020, p. 149). The defensive strategies that Ramos and Yi noted, allowed participants to "survive in oppressive spaces, [where] they opted to not respond externally due to potential negative consequences associated with addressing these incidents directly" (p. 149). The researchers noted that in controlled strategies participants had some level of conscious awareness of and to oppression. They noted that these oppressive situations demanded a more structured and deliberate process to respond to incidents of sexism and racism. The authors observed that direct strategies to combat sexism and racism were used to regain control from an oppressor and from forms of oppression in ways that educated the oppressor in a timely manner. Ramos and Yi's (2020) research highlights how women of color succeed not because of the learning environment they often enter but despite that environment.

While there is limited research on the success of African American and Latinx women, the research that exists highlights the role of family, the importance of mentors, and how the environment can enhance African American and Latinx women's ability to succeed. The research also emphasizes the importance of support in- and outside academia. However, at the core of any change in the curriculum. Elizabeth Higginbotham (1995) stated:

> To be successful, transforming the curriculum involves three interrelated tasks. The first is to gain information about the diversity of the female experience. The second task is to decide how to teach this new material, a process that typically involves reconceptualizing one's discipline in light of a race, class, and gender-based analysis…The third task is to structure classroom dynamics that ensure a safe atmosphere to support learning for all students. (p. 474)

To ensure the continued success of African American and Latinx women, there must be a concerted effort to address limits in the research. Researcher, practitioners, and administrators must do their part to add to the conversation of African American and Latinx women's success that both acknowledges barriers and emphasizes where and how these women succeed. Institutions must acknowledge that the politics of gender dictates levels of power and work to ensure that the education of Black and brown women provides access to that power. Leaders and educators must continue the dialogue that celebrates the successes of women through the telling of their stories. A discussion of the successes of African American and Latina women follows, supported with factors that influence their experiences in the academy.

African American Women Success

Patterson (2004) noted that self-esteem is developed through relational and familial environments. Furthermore, self-esteem among Blacks is not derived from Whites (Baldwin et al., 1991; Crocker & Major, 1989). This idea was specifically applied to African American women who were once predicted to have low self-esteem in comparison to White female

counterparts. Patterson (2004) found that Black women, when compared to their White counterparts, were shown to have higher self-esteem than White women. Additionally, Patterson noted that Black women may be better equipped to maintain high self-esteem throughout their lives due to strong support networks.

DeFrancisco and Chatham-Carpenter (2000) interviewed 21 women aged 21 to 69 and conducted follow-up focus groups to better understand self-esteem in African American women. They used the personal identity development theory and Black Feminist Thought as their theoretical frameworks and found that, although African American women face many adversities related to racism and sexism, they still had higher self-esteem than their White female counterparts. The researchers identified the tools used for heightened self-esteem as developed survival strategies that allowed African American women to combat negative messages. Additionally, DeFrancisco and Chatham-Carter found that social support and self-reliance were key to African American women's high self-esteem. How individuals view themselves appears to impact their ability to succeed.

Grant and Ghee (2015) stated that mentoring is at the center of African American women's success in the academy. The support of others coupled with a desire to understand self-esteem among women of color is perhaps the most appropriate place to start the conversation of the success of African American women. Johnson (2016) noted that African American women "stressed the importance of a commitment to the value of creating a positive environment to others in institutions of higher education, especially for African American women" (p. 97).

Grant and Ghee (2015) used and an auto-ethnographic approach that focused on their primary experiences as two African American women to examine their socialization at a

predominantly White institution (PWI). The researchers formed an informal mentor and protégé relationship in an Educational Leadership Mentoring Network. They met face-to-face, journaled, completed observations, reflections, and conducted a content analysis. Along with this process, the researchers shared stories and experiences. They "questioned, listened, and pondered over our early challenges and feelings of inadequacy and isolation" (Grant & Ghee, 2015, p. 770). They found that traditional and nontraditional mentoring such as same gender and race mentoring and cross-cultural race and gender mentoring, as the most important aspect in their doctoral preparation and advancement in the academy. According to Grant and Ghee, having a mentor is key, it does not need to be formal but should exist in some format. They contend that important information resides in African American women and that information can and should be shared between African American women. Grant and Ghee stated that they learned seven lessons from their research:

- In the absence of formal mentoring for African-American women in PWIs, African-American women in PWIs have a series of unique experiences which have a direct impact on their doctoral preparation, successful entry into the professoriate, as well as their advancement therein;
- An informal mentoring relationship may assist African-American women in PWIs in becoming better adjusted socially and institutionally, and more productive to their scholarship and practice;
- Informal mentoring relationships may aid African-American women in PWIs in doctoral preparation, entry into the professoriate and tenure attainment;
- Sharing and developing academic knowledge and expertise supports both academic growth and institutional socialization;
- An informal mentor/mentee relationship can foster feelings of safety, esteem, and support – key factors that may positively influence socialization;
- That an informal mentor/mentee relationship can encourage African-American women, despite different trajectories, to reflect continually on their emerging roles as professors, researchers, and service providers, and are a useful tool for assuming responsibility for one's own learning and aligning behavior with expected practice; and
- The learning and benefits derived from an informal mentor/mentee relationship can be as unique as those involved in the relationship. (p. 778)

In short, the relationships that African American women build helped to make success possible. When mentoring is central to the process both the mentor and mentee gain from the experience.

Johnson (2016) conducted qualitative research using purposeful sampling and criterion-based selection to identify 10 African American female staff members working at a predominately White institution (PWI) in the Midwest. The research included a survey that utilized both a Likert scale and open-ended questions as well as in-depth interviews. Johnson's study focused on the work experiences of these women, explored their challenges at a PWI, and examined the strategies they utilized to cope in their working environments. She identified four themes through this process: (a) obstacles to advancement, (b) colleague interactions, (c) support and coping mechanisms, and (d) mentoring. Two themes from Johnson's work that tie directly to the current research are support and coping mechanisms and mentoring.

Johnson (2016) noted that, due to their numbers and institutional racial and gender inequity, "Black women in academia [need] to employ a variety of coping strategies that have been key to their academic and professional advancement[s]" (pp. 108-109). In her research, Johnson noted four primary areas used where women found support with coping: (a) spiritual, through prayer and reflection; (b) other African American women, through well-developed and sustained relationships for mentorship and as someone experiencing the world through a similar lens; (c) family, spouses, partners, children, and parents both as caregivers and the reason why success was important; and (d) friends, who become surrogate family members. Johnson noted that, along with their coping skills, the ability to have a mentor enhanced the experiences of African American women.

Johnson (2016) used Moss and Debres' (1999) definition of mentoring as feminist practice and noted that this practice required the promotion of "women, people of color, and others who are not positioned in places or positions of power within the academy and assisted them with the negotiation of relations within the academy" (p. 111). Mentorship through feminist practice occurs through: (a) role modeling and assisting others in not feeling alone; (b) creating a collective voice by ensuring that the voices of women are infused into the conversation; and (c) networking through the development and creation of spaces and places for women to come together. Johnson's research highlights the importance of providing mechanisms that enhance a student's ability to cope and find support as these mechanisms, along with access to mentors, help to set the stage for success.

Latinx Women Success

In her attempt to understand the experiences of Chicana and Latinx women within the professorate, Carmona (2020) noted that the research is rich in describing the inadequacies that face Chicana and Latinx women's inequitable treatment in recruitment, classroom experiences, and unfair expectations toward tenure. Carmona noted that the research lacked "a large body of work which points to specific details to how Chicana/Latinas navigate, negotiate, and resist those structures which place them at an unfair advantage" (p. 17). Carmona used testimonio (testimony) and pláticas (talk/chat) inquiry through Chicana feminist epistemological to examine how Chicana/Latinas navigate, negotiate, and resist the hegemonic structures of higher education. The participants for her student were three Chicana/Latinas – a doctoral student, a tenure track professor, and a recently tenured (fewer than three years) professor.

Carmona (2020) found four consistent challenges and obstacles faced by Chicana/Latina women (a) hegemonic academic structures which reward certain types of research, service, and teaching over others; (b) the women encountered contradictory practices based on their gender and ethnicity; (c) trauma inflicted by faculty peers, administrators, students, family members, and (d) unrealistic labor production expectations. The participants, of her study, noted that they needed to rethink the false narrative about choice. Carmona noted that participants actively created roadmaps that moved them toward success. She noted these roadmaps required these three women to continuously recalculate based on negotiation with and within a system, not built for them. Through practice, the women in her study found ways to recognize when to resist and any potential consequences that may exist. Ultimately, Carmona noted that there is a consistent call to action needed for continued change for Chicana/Latina women to succeed in the academy.

Family is central to the Latinx community; how one relates to and interacts with their Latinx parents has an impact on the transition to college and college success (Gloria et al., 2020). Pérez (2018) used a narrative approach of qualitative research design to understand the academic relationships of first-generation Latina students with their mothers. For her research, Pérez selected seven first-generation Latina students who recently graduated from college and had a mother or female guardian who self-identified as Latina. She conducted two semi-structured pláticas for both the Latina students and their Latina identifying mothers/guardians. At the core of Pérez's work was the desire to make sense of how Latina students understood "the ways in which their mothers supported them in their educational pursuits" (p. 31).

In her research of Latina students and their mothers, Pérez (2018) found five overarching themes (a) mothers' stories of struggles were used as motivation to acquire an education; (b) unconditional support from mothers at all costs; (c) a need for academic support outside the family; (d) college persistence is cultivated through individual resiliency; and (e) there is a disconnect between Latinx families and the education system in the U.S. While Pérez's research also highlighted a lack of understanding of U.S. higher education system, it shows how persistence by both Latina students and their mothers helped to move Latinas toward success. Pérez also remarked that if institutions of higher education want to support the success of Latina students these institutions must provide mentors and pre-college opportunities for Latinx women.

Like Carmona's (2020) research, Crespo (2013) used a heuristic phenomenological research method to help understand the factors that influence the career path of Latina women in higher education. As part of her research process, Crespo used storytelling to integrate critical race theory with LatCrit theory. Homogeneous sampling and intensity sampling were used to select participants for her study. Specifically, Crespo conducted in-person interviews with 16 self-identified Latinas who were senior administrators at institutions of higher education. The participants in the study were first-, second- and third-generation Latinas from a cross-section of Latinx countries and Puerto Rico.

Crespo (2013) noted that through storytelling, LatCrit theory provided insight into the lives of Latina women and shed light on what is currently a small population of women administrators in higher educations. Crespo highlighted the themes that emerged in her research: (a) external factors through the environment; (b) economic background and its impact on resources; (c) lack of pre-college support systems in high school; (d) their actual

college experience; (e) racialized college experiences; (f) a strong desire to teach; (g) supportive family; (h) supportive supervisors; and (i) self-determination of the individual. She also noted that programs like Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) Institute and American Council on Education (ACE) Women's Leadership forum enhanced the experiences of women. She stated that higher education leadership programs were established to train future leaders in higher education and that Latina women are not appropriately represented in senior leadership positions. She found that programs that support the development of women, specifically Latina women, provided opportunities for women to hone their skills, to learn and grow together.

Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed in Chapter 3 described the relevant concepts that were investigated in the current research study. Although an abundance of research exists on college transitions and success, the breadth and depth of the research explicitly focusing on the experiences of women who are heads of households are lacking. Based on this literature review, essential gaps were identified relating to the absence of published research that addresses the phenomenon of the lived experiences of women transitioning from employment to college. Chapter 4 explains the methodology for this study. In addition, Chapter 4 details the rationale for qualitative research, the researcher's role, design of the study, data collection, data analysis, limitations, validity, and reliability of the research study, along with ethical issues.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

The transition to college can be a stressful life event, especially for nontraditional female students transitioning from employment to college. Ross-Gordan (2001) asserted that the differences in traditional-aged students and their adult learner peers were influenced by the high likelihood that the adult learners juggled other life roles, such as worker, spouse or partner, parent, caregiver, and community member while they attended college. Additionally, research has shown that first-generation students tend to work longer hours and have more significant family responsibilities than their non-first-generation peers (Barry et al., 2009). The purpose of this post-intentional phenomenological study was to understand this transition from the viewpoint of the experiences of women as they move from employment to college. Gaining insight into the transitions of these women led to a more complete understanding of their lived experiences. The most prevailing means for gaining an understanding of the transition of female students from employment to college was through interviews, journals, and observations after they completed at least one semester of college. The phenomenon or unit of study for this analysis is expressed as transition and defined as the complex process of becoming a first-time freshman at an accredited college or university.

Phenomenological research, a form of qualitative research that attempts to understand the hidden meanings and essence of the experiences of participants, was the major perspective (Grbich, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The current study was committed to understanding how phenomena, viewed through lived experiences, are always seen in partial and multiple ways and are always in the process of becoming (Soule & Freeman, 2019; Vagle, 2018). Interviews were key to the current study to examine transition through the

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experiences of women who have experienced the transition from employment to college. Additionally, the narratives that the participants created through journaling ensured that their full voices were part of the data collection process. Finally, observations were used to help develop a complete picture of the transitions of women as the moved from employment to college.

The two central questions and the sub-questions of the study were:

Central Question One: What is the lived experience of transitioning from employment to college for African American and Latinx women who are low-SES and first-generation students?

- What motivates them to become college students after years of employment?
- How do they articulate their experiences related to transitioning to college?

Central Question Two: What is the essential structure in the meaning of attending college for African American and Latinx women who are low-SES and first-generation students?

- What are some of the experiences they identify as being significant during the first semester of college?
- What does college success mean to them after their first semester of enrollment?

The motivation for conducting the current research was the sheer lack of information focused on the college experiences of female students and the successful transitions of women who are low-SES and first-generation students (Lin, 2016; Neal-Jackson, 2018). Literature related to first-generation and low-SES students exists; however, when heads of households were added to the equation, the number of relevant studies is significantly reduced. Lin (2016) noted that much of the research on adult learners considered all adult learners as a group, mixing class, gender, and race/ethnicity. A study by Neal-Jackson (2018)

highlighted how the current focus on the success of men and boys of color neglected the experiences of women and girls who live through the same experiences. These gaps in the research mean that administrators of colleges and universities have an incomplete picture of how to serve female students as they begin their college transitions. Women's voices must be added to and untangled from other literature on college success to ensure that colleges and universities have a clearer understanding of how to support this growing population of students.

This chapter presents the rationale for using qualitative research and an overview of both phenomenological and narrative research. The rationale and overview are followed by the research design that provides a description of the setting and participants, including sampling strategies for the current research, data sources, and data analysis procedures. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations, validity, reliability, and ethical concerns of the study. The discussion that follows highlights the rationale for using qualitative research to examine the transition of women who from employment to college.

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Rationale for Qualitative Research

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Qualitative research was used for the study because it allowed for a thick-rich description of the human experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Grbich, 2013; Miles et al., 2013; Patton, 2015; Soule & Freeman, 2019; Vagle, 2018). Using qualitative methodology increased my ability to capture the meanings of the participants' transitions by using their stories to understand the phenomenon of transition. Historically, qualitative research is not without philosophical and methodological issues. The words frame the concepts of the researcher and infer a conveyance of values or impressions. Qualitative research is considerably complex, and researchers must be continually aware and careful when

analyzing data (Miles et al., 2013). However, the strengths of qualitative data reside within the ability to express lived experiences in rich detail. Lived experiences, Patton (2015) remarked, allow researchers to explore how human beings make sense of their experiences and transform experiences into consciousness, both individually and as shared meanings. Miles et al. (2013) state that, in qualitative research, the researcher can preserve chronological flow to better understand which events led to which consequences and derive rich explanations of the research topic. Qualitative research supports the understanding of d the everyday experiences of ordinary people (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Therefore, the desire to understand the ordinary experiences of women as they experienced and perceived their transitions from employment to education influenced my decision to use qualitative research.

Qualitative research, in the form of a phenomenological design, was explicitly selected because through it, "rich detail of the essence of people's experiences of a phenomenon [can] be explored, described, communicated, and possibly interpreted" (Grbich, 2013, p. 92). The phenomenological design allowed for women's in-depth descriptions of their transition as they live that transition from employment to college. Added to these experiences are their lived experiences of being heads of households or caregivers as they navigated the transition process.

Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenological inquiry allows qualitative researchers to describe the lived experiences of a phenomenon. The phenomenological approach was developed as early as 1913 by German philosopher Husserl so that researchers might gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of everyday experiences (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Soule & Freeman, 2019; Vagle 2018). Moustakas (1994) stated that Husserl believed that

knowledge comes from the discovery of meanings and essences. Essences are objects that

exist and can be known through essential or imaginative intuition involving interactions

between a researcher and respondents or between a researcher and texts (Moustakas, 1994).

Transition as a phenomenon is not a single experience, but many experiences that occur over

time, and the telling of those experiences allowed the phenomenon to be revealed. Moustakas

(1994) also became aware that Husserl believed that any phenomenon had to start with an

investigation. However, Heidegger (1998) and the Heideggerian perspective that followed

postulated that hermeneutics took social interactions and linguistics into consideration when

exploring phenomena. I used a post-intentional phenomenological methodology to gain a

deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Soule & Freeman, 2019; Vagle, 2018). Table 3

explores the conceptualized intentionality of Husserl, Heidegger, and Vagle and underscores

why the post-intentional lens of phenomenology was the appropriate strategy to use in this

research. Moreover, the approach described here allowed me to explore and explain

everyone's lived experiences that brought about meaning for them as African American and

Latinx women who lived through the transition from employment to college.

Table 3
Three Phenomenological Approaches to Research

Phenomenological Approach	Descriptive	Interpretive	Post-Intentional
Foundational Theorist Intentionality Conceptualized	Edmund Husserl How the essential structures of phenomena are revealed through intentionality toward experiences in the world	Martin Heidegger How the modes of being of phenomena are constituted through hermeneutics, i.e., interpretation in the social and linguistic context of the experience	Mark Vagle How phenomena are always appearing and disappearing, and are seen in partial and multiple ways, always in the process of becoming

Note. data for table is based on Gadamer (1994), Heidegger (1998), Sartre (1948), and Vagle (2018)

While the most common form of phenomenology, transcendental phenomenology, focuses

on the essence of the meaning for the group (Moustakas, 1994), post-intentional

phenomenology centers the individual at the heart of making meaning (Vagle, 2018).

Post-Intentional Phenomenology

How women experience the transition from employment to college is not a static and unchanging structure but rather a fraction of a view of a temporary experience. Valentine et al. (2018) stated phenomena in post-intentional phenomenology are best understood "through the multiple and variant ways they emerge in the world—through lived experiences as well as objects in the world" (p. 467). The research design for this study then followed Vagle's (2018) post-intentional phenomenology research approach; it shifted from the first phenomenology of Husserl and an extension on the works of Heidegger (1998), Gadamer (1994), Sartre (1948), and others. A post-intentional phenomenology design allowed me to remain open to exploring and discovering the tentative manifestations that intentionally flowed through and meaningfully connected students to the experiences of transitioning from employment to college. Post-intentional phenomenology supported an examination of the intentional relationships that reveal themselves as "confusion, respect, despair, hope, resistance…" (Vagle, 2018 p. 28). Meaning frames the experience as a construct that appears in multiple, partial, and fleeting ways. The post-intentional phenomenology approach, aligned with this study's research problem and purpose, promoted the description and interpretation of the intentional threads of attitudes, perceptions, and mental models that explained what it is to live in and through the transition of becoming a student.

The post-intentional phenomenological research approach constitutes only one type of research design used in phenomenological research (Mile[et al., 2013; Soule & Freeman, 2019; Vagle 2018; Valentine et al., 2018). Post-intentional design builds on Heidegger's (1926/1998) philosophy and interpretive method of studying being-in something—herein, African American and Latinx women transitioning from employment to college—while

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being mindful of how parts of phenomena are always moving, extracting meaning from those

moments, and communicating what it is to live in and through the intentional relationship

that connects students (as subjects) and higher education (as objects). Vagle observes that the

five-component process of the post-intentional phenomenology research approach involves

an open and shifting cyclical pattern; described as:

1. Identify a post-intentional phenomenon in context(s) around a social issue.
2. Devise a clear yet flexible process for gathering phenomenological material appropriate for the phenomenon under investigation.
3. Make a post-reflexion plan.
4. Explore the post-intentional phenomenon using theory, phenomenological material, and post-reflexions.
5. Craft a text that engages the productions and provocations of the post-intentional phenomenon in context(s) around a social issue. (p. 139)

This five-component process threads throughout the current research to extrapolate the

tentative manifestations that intentionally connect to the phenomenon, the subject, and the

object, within the lived experience. As such, the transition from employment to college (as

the phenomenon) interconnects with African American and Latinx women (as subjects) and

higher education institutions (as objects) after completing at least one semester in college.

For clarity, each component listed linearly above is detailed below for replication purposes

pertaining to future research; however, it is important to note that the five-component process

is not linear but flows in, out, and between the experiences of the individual participants of

this study.

Component 1: Identify a Post-Intentional Phenomenon in Context(s), around a Social Issue.

Vagle (2018) states that in post-intentional phenomenology, the phenomenon is

something an individual experiences and a social apparatus – it is "produced and produces, is

provoked and provokes – through social relations in the world" (p. 140). Post-intentional

phenomena are conceived through social relations and given birth through lived experiences such as discourse, habits, and policies (Soule & Freeman, 2019; Vagle, 2018). This first component in Vagle's (2018) post-intentional research approach includes seven processes:

- State the research problem – understand why the study is important.

- Conduct a review of the partial relevant literature – situate the research in existing literature to capture a snapshot of the phenomenon as it is being lived.

- Identify and discuss theories you want to think with – using a generative process guided by theoretical philosophical roots.

- Remain open to multiple and varied contexts of the phenomenon while it is being studied.

- Reflect on possible social change – how might the research affect social change, regardless of the size of the change.

- Select the research participants – ensure participants have experienced the phenomenon.

- Form research questions – what it is like to, what it means to, what it is to find oneself. (p. 149)

After moving through these seven processes, the researcher is open to explore the next four components of Vagle's post-intentional process.

Component 2: Devise a Clear Yet Flexible Process for Gathering Phenomenological Material Appropriate for the Phenomenon Under Investigation.

Unlike other forms of phenomenological research, post-intentional researchers are not finding essences or describing themes. Post-intentional researchers are "exploring how the

phenomenon might take shape, how it is produced in time and space, and how it is entangled and provoked" (p.150). Data for post-intentional phenomenological research can come from a myriad of sources and in varied forms. While the current study focused on semi-structured interviews that explored lived experiences, it also included journals and personal observations. Vagle suggests that once the phenomenological material is selected, describe how you will gather that material and why it is essential. Finally, Vagle (2018) recommends developing a table that shows which material will help to identify data sources for addressing the primary or secondary questions.

Component 3: Make a Post-Reflexion Plan.

According to Vagle, post-reflexivity, in post-intentional phenomenological research, is "an out-growth of descriptive phenomenology's focus on bracketing and reflective life-world research approaches' focus on bridling" (p. 153). Unlike the bracketing process of setting aside prior knowledge, assumptions, and beliefs about the phenomenon, post-reflexions of the post-intentional process are about exploring how prior knowledge, assumptions, and beliefs help understand the production of phenomena. The goal for researchers is to identify what frames the ways they are "seeing" to locate and name their personal assumptions of what is normal and what surprises them (Soule & Freeman, 2019; Vagle, 2018). Post-reflexion is an ongoing process that occurs before, during, and after phenomenological materials are brought together. A post-reflexion plan can include a post-reflecting journal where the researcher can have "space to wonder, question, think, contradict yourself, agree with yourself, vent, scream, laugh, and celebrate" (Vagle, 2018, p. 155). Additionally, Vagle says to write an initial post-reflexion statement that would allow me, as the researcher, to focus on personal beliefs and to frame perspectives. My initial post-

reflexion statement included aspects of my own identity, i.e., being a nontraditional-aged student, identifying as African American, being a parent, etc. Finally, post-reflexion was one of the three primary aspects of the analysis process; and it was crucial to continually conduct the process throughout the research. It is important to reiterate that journaling in a post-reflecting journal is different than the post-reflexion process. The post-reflecting journal is where the researcher keeps personal observations; the post-reflexion process is where the researcher brings all the materials together to gain understanding.

Component 4: Explore the Post-Intentional Phenomenon Using Theory, Phenomenological Material, and Post-Reflexions

Vagle (2018) noted there are many analysis options available to post-intentional phenomenology. The typical forms of analysis are descriptive or interpretive. Descriptive analysis, through epoché/bracketing, looks beyond preconceptions, taps directly into the essence of the whole and interpretive analysis through the hermeneutic process, and helps to find the meaning of experiences (Matua et al., 2015; Vagle 2018). However, in post-intentional phenomenology, "it is only important to complete one round of careful line-by-line reading of interview transcripts, lived-experience descriptions, and field notes" (Vagle, 2018, pp. 156-157); bracketing of the researcher's experiences is not required. I interject here to underscore that interpretation of the data, created through reflections, replaced field notes for the current study. After the line-by-line reading, post-intentional researchers (a) offer a three-part process to the analysis of material within the researcher's selected theories: (a) deconstruct the wholes of the phenomenological materials, (b) think with theory, and (c) analyze post-reflexions (Soule & Freeman, 2019; Vagle, 201).

Deconstruction of the whole required noticing how points of knowledge were used and where other points of knowledge existed. Deconstructing the whole also required finding comfort in being uncomfortable when knowledge was quickly applied and disappeared and deciding what to do with that point of knowledge. Think with theory was the process of examining the assumed theories that were part of the research design process, spending time with those theories, leaving behind what did not fit, and adding theories that help to explore the phenomenon. Analysis of post-reflexions is the space where all preconceived ideas were examined to understand where interpretations began, followed by building from interpretations and unpacking ideas in the post-reflexion journal entries to determine how phenomena were shaped. A full description of the analysis process is presented in the data analysis section of this chapter.

Component 5: Craft a Text that Engages the Productions and Provocations of the Post-Intentional Phenomenon in Context(s), around a Social Issue.

In component 5, Vagle (2018) encourages the author of post-intentional phenomenological research to be free to "play with the form, bringing all that you have from the phenomenological material…to bear" (p.160). Vagle, acknowledging the long and involved process of the writing phase, noted that post-intentional phenomenologists are allowed the freedom to organize text in the way and form they want to communicate. How the data come to life is influenced by a far-away view (provocation) and the trigger (catalyst) that ignited thinking about the phenomena and the production that signified the way the phenomena were constantly being shaped over time. Provocation and trigger are Vagle's way of informing the post-intentional phenomenologist that phenomena remain in a constant state of production.

If, as Vagle suggests, phenomena are constantly changing and evolving, how can researchers understand an individual's concept of reality? Are phenomenology and epistemology at odds with one another? I addressed this issue by moving away from the idea of assessing the experiences of African American and Latinx women's transitioning to college and moving toward understanding how their individual experiences contribute to their transitions. By broadening epistemology to allow for the possibility of a multitude of realities, informed by diverse experiences, allow phenomenologist to actively embrace epistemology (Soule & Freeman, 2019; Vagle, 2018). The short-lived nature of phenomena means that the qualitative data I collected only reflected how each individual constructed reality for these events in their lives with the understanding that reality continues to evolve. Vagle speaks directly to the evolution of experiences through the idea of three Lines of Flight, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Lines of Flight

First Line of Flight	How things connect	Fluid; shape-shifting; continually on the move
Second Line of Flight	What is continually being constructed	Cultured; gendered; socially classed
Third Line of Flight	Decision to join or not join (self or the group)	Distances; intensities; movement
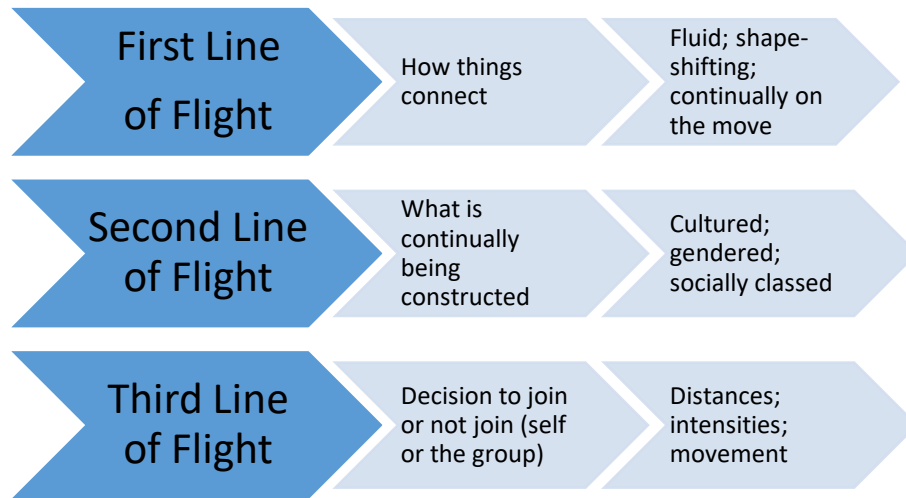
The lines of flight concept of bring new understanding to the notion of phenomenology as static descriptions and interpretations to a persistent state of being

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1997; Vagle, 2018). In the first line of flight Vagle (2018) points out that phenomena are explained by how they connect and change with experiences rather than describing what the experiences appear to be. The second line of flight offers an explanation about how the individual, through experiences, changes as the phenomena evolves. These first two lines of flight are embodied by African American and Latinx women who have lived through the experience of completing at least one semester at a community college. Their experiences within the context of being a college student evolved as they gained knowledge and capabilities, and as Vagle observes, as they gain experience, their identities evolve. The third line of flight considers the evolving awareness of individuals and their places in the world. For African American and Latinx women, the third line of flight is reflected in the double conscience of knowing how they see themselves while simultaneously understanding how others see them. For African Americans and Latinx women, in spaces where diversity is limited, this experience is intensified; as experiences accumulate, individuals' awareness of their positions in relation to the rest of the world changes. As highlighted earlier in the text, post-intentional phenomenology was informed by narrative inquiry, which aided the telling of their individual stories.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative tradition that connects naturally with phenomenology, as it is through the telling of an experience that understanding is gained (Adams, 2008; Hussein, 2008). Narrative and storying are ways in which people express their personal views of the world (Adams, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2012; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010; Hussein, 2008). Adams (2008) stated that "narratives help us make sense of life, and in the telling of stories, we abide by storying conventions, such as the

use of common storylines, linear or chaotic temporal sequences, and writing within/against genres" (p. 177). Narrative inquiry, used alongside post-intentional, ensured the integration of the voices of women into the study. Narrative inquiry focuses on the individual and gathers data through storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2012).

My first experience with narratives was when my grandmother told stories about our history and our place in the world. From that experience, I was reminded that communities throughout history had used narratives through storytelling to ensure that the experiences of their people are not lost. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted that, through narrative inquiry, we experience stories as they are lived and told. Reflecting on Dewey (1916), Clandinin and Connelly remind narrative researchers that, while experiences are personal, they occur in a social context in which the experience can be researched and understood. Elbaz-Luwisch (2010) explained that narrative researchers are responsible for presenting narratives in ways to make judgments regarding the truthfulness and accuracy of the findings. The narrative inquiry in this study consists of a close examination of the stories of women as they experience the phenomenon of transitions to college.

Narratives are more than storytelling and indicate how an individual constructs meaning regarding a phenomenon. Clandinin and Huber (2012) suggested that narrative inquiry researchers follow a recursive flow of moving from the subject of a story to data and research text. Narrative researchers aim to understand participants' experiences and how they articulate those experiences through storytelling to write research text that interprets the personal and social perspectives of participants' experiences with that phenomenon (Clandinin & Huber, 2012; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010).

In my study, narratives took the form of interviews and journals and became specific forms of data viewed with a post-intentional lens. Hussein (2008) suggested that narrative understanding is closer to the knower than any other form of experience. The journals were considered an uninterrupted opportunity for the participants to express their ideas without regard to who was listening. Participants told their stories, guided by semi-structured questions that allowed me to contextualize their experiences. A more well-rounded understanding of the participants was gained using narratives. Further, narratives allowed for an expansion of the overall knowledge of the students' transitions from employment to college. It was that closeness to the students and how they told their stories in interviews and journals that I uncovered the commonalities of the students' experiences and where those commonalities existed.

Hussein's (2008) approach to narrative research is of particular significance because it is gives voice to adult learners. Hussein found that a semi-structured approach within which adult learners are asked to discuss their experiences with narrative enabled "the learners to share experiences and reflect on the different circles of meaning embedded in their narrative experiences" (p. 412). An exploration of the natural connections between phenomenology and narrative inquiry supported a fuller account of students' transitions from employment to college, specifically as these pertain to African American and Latinx female students. I carefully followed the design of the study, guided by post-intentional phenomenology and narrative.

Design of the Study

Qualitative research requires that the study be well-designed and at the same time open enough to capture the essence of meanings; post-intentional phenomenology provides a

flexible data collection process that could be continuously refined as more knowledge was gained (Vagle, 2018). The flexible design of this study enabled me to explore the phenomenon of how African American and Latinx women experienced transitioning from employment to college. The following section presents an overview of the setting for the study, along with information related to sampling for participants. The three data sources, semi-structured interviews, journals, and observations, were described in explicit detail.

Setting

Multiple settings are included in this discussion; the settings where the transitions from employment to college occurred, where I conducted interviews, and the setting for each participant's interview. These three settings give an overarching perspective of the context of the setting in its totality.

The setting where the participants for this study transitioned from employment was a large urban-serving, two-year community college accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. The college is designated as a predominately black institution, with more than 51% of its student population identifying as African American and approximately 75% of the student population identifying as non-White. At the time of the study, 61% of the student population was made up of women. The college has more than 30,000 students taking credit and non-credit classes. Of that number, more than 26,000 were enrolled in credit-bearing courses, giving the college a full-time equivalent (FTE) status of more than 14,500 students. The college offered more than 70 associate degrees and academic and proficiency certificate programs. Seventy-eight percent of the graduates of the institution are employed in the local urban area, and 93% work in the greater metropolitan region. Eighty-three percent of the full-time and 73% of part-time students received financial aid. As

an open admission, associate degree-granting institution, the college's mission is to provide access to higher education for all who may benefit.

I chose this urban community college because of the population it serves, the types of resources available to its students, and the costs associated with attending the institution. As an urban institution with a community-focused mission, the college has positioned itself to assist members of its community. Many of the students attended an underfunded K-12 education system that struggled financially and academically for many years. More than 60% of the students from this K-12 system, who apply to the college, are required to take remedial coursework. The college has developed success systems, such as intrusive academic advising, multiple learning labs, library resources, a student success initiative center that includes proactive and reactive resources, and a center for male success. The institution is one of the few community colleges to have a women's center, which also provides oversight for a childcare center with no cost or low cost for students.

An added benefit of the college is the cost to attend. The federal Pell Grant can meet the total expenses of the coursework for those who qualify. The Pell Grant is the United States federal government's subsidy program devised for students in need of financial assistance for college. The program is limited to students who have not earned their first bachelor's degrees and enroll in specific post-baccalaureate programs through participating institutions. Students can continue to access this federal aid when transferring to a four-year university.

This study was completed in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic; this dictated how the interview occurred. The settings for the interviews were virtual, using Zoom as the platform to record the interviews. I was in my home or work office for all six interviews. The

spaces were familiar and comfortable to me. I did not use a virtual background and allowed the participants to see and observe me in my natural spaces. However, I was careful to protect their identities, described the purpose of the study and emphasized they could drop out at any time, and asked them to provide pseudonyms in place of their real names.

Four of the participants, Amber, Sonya, Lynn, and Marie (pseudonyms), completed the interviews from their homes. Amber and Sonya's children were at home and did not require their attention during their interviews. Both participants were in spaces that they had created as home offices to complete the coursework. Lynn was home alone in her office with no discernible distractions. Marie was home with her dog, which needed her attention at different times during the interview; she would apologize for the interruption, take care of her dog, and return to the conversation.

Frida (pseudonym) completed her interview from her car. I asked several times before the interview started if it would be better to reschedule. She declined the offer to reschedule and remained attentive during the interview. I stayed mindful and watchful for any indication that she was putting herself at risk, prepared to stop the interview if necessary. We spent much of the interview with her stuck in traffic, making little progress to her destination.

Sheila (pseudonym) completed her interview from the reception desk at her office. She apologized for not having a quiet place, but someone had taken off from work, and Sheila needed to provide support for that role during the time the interview was scheduled. Several people walked in and out of the office and stood in the background during the interview. I was unnecessarily worried that Sheila would not be forthcoming in her answers, instead; she was proud of what she was saying and made it clear that her story resonated throughout all aspects of her life.

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Participants and Sampling Technique

In qualitative research studies, the underlining principle used when selecting study participants is selecting individuals who can provide complete descriptions of their experiences to help the researcher better understand the experience (Patton, 2015, Seidman, 2013). I applied the principles described in Patton (2015) when selecting the participants for the proposed study.

Criteria sampling strategies were used as the primary source to select the participants for this study, followed by snowball sampling (Patton, 2015). Criteria sampling requires that all the participants meet specific conditions. Creswell and Poth, 2018 state, "criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon" (p. 157). The criteria for the current study required that participants identify as female, aged 25 or older, African American, Latinx (Hispanic/Latina), Pell Grant eligible, provide support for someone other than themselves, have completed at least one semester of college, and have worked at least seven years inside or outside the home prior to attending college.

Administrators from the selected institution sent an email to all students who met the criteria. Potential participants completed a Qualtrics survey; of the 28 potential participants who completed the Qualtrics survey, 23 were identified as meeting all criteria. An email was sent to the 23 eligible participants, five of which responded, with only four agreeing to participate in the study. The goal was to have six participants for the study, and snowball sampling with the four participants, who completed their interviews, provided two additional participants. Snowball sampling occurs when individuals are asked to assist with recruitment to identify the most purposeful participants that can provide a rich, thick description of the

phenomenon (Grbich, 2012; Miles et al., 2013; Patton, 2015). Merriam and Tisdale (2015) state, "snowball, chain, or network sampling is perhaps the most common form of purposeful sampling" (p. 98). Eventually, three African American and three Latinx women agreed to participate in the study.

Data Sources

In-depth interviews, documents as journals, and observations were used as data for the study. These three methods allowed for the exploration of the phenomenon, transition from employment to college. The interviews were completed via Zoom, which allowed the transcript to be instant with a timeline built into the transcript. The Zoom interviews allowed me to review the interviews multiple times and review the context in which a participant responded. These data sources contributed to the validity of the data and yielded sufficient information about the experiences of the six participants. I was able to make meaning of their experiences through multiple data sources that contributed to crystallization. Ellingson (2009) purported crystallization "offers deep, thickly described, complexly rendered interpretations of meaning about a phenomenon or group" (p. 10). The primary data source of interviews, conversations with a purpose follow.

The Nature of Qualitative Interviews

As the primary data source of the study, interviews are specifically crucial in a post-intentional phenomenological inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2012; Patton, 2015; Vagle, 2018). In qualitative research, methods often involve a review of documents and time spent doing observations; while these methods are significant and add to the understanding of the topic, they cannot replace the process of conducting an interview. Open-ended questions (see Appendix A) were constructed to make meaning of the unit of

analysis, transitioning from employment to college. Creswell and Poth (2018) indicate that researchers should be good listeners and less frequent speakers during an interview. Conducting face-to-face virtual interviews led to a rich thick description of information.

The interviews were informal conversations that were conducted with an open-ended approach using semi-structured questions that allow the researcher to probe based on the unique experiences of each participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2012; Patton, 2015). Additionally, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) remind researchers that field notes will help ensure a more robust interview process. After the interviews, constructing extensive field notes ensured that I considered the context of the interviews within the full setting and environment in which the questions were asked. I conducted a unique type of interview used for post-intentional phenomenology.

Phenomenological Interviews

Phenomenological interviews are used to obtain a full description of participants' lived experiences concerning a particular phenomenon (deMarrais, 2004; Patton, 2015; Seidman, 2013). I used open-ended and semi-structured questions to probe the unique experiences of each participant. Seidman (2013) provided a three-interview framework for phenomenological interviews that seek to establish context through a focus on history, reconstructing details, and reflecting on meaning. While this process may be appropriate for other research topics, it is not the process that I chose to employ for these interviews. I felt that follow-up interviews would only be necessary when clarification of the original interviews was needed. The process of videoing the interview allowed me to go back to clarify the context and intended meaning of the participant and to revisit how I asked or responded to a question.

Before starting the interview, I asked each participant to read an introductory script, identified as the Informed Consent Cover Letter (see Appendix B), and to verbally acknowledge the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C), thereby giving permission to be video recorded using the Zoom online platform.

Using qualitative interviews and framing my questions in a phenomenological perspective gave an understanding of how meaning was created. As outlined by deMarrais (2004), I employed the phenomenological interview design and began with open-ended questions specifically designed to obtain responses concerning the participants' roles prior to returning. When needed to expand or clarify a response, I utilized probing. My interview guide included questions designed for this purpose, but in some cases, these did not always fit; I had to contextualize interviews based on unique experiences. The sample questions listed below were based on research conducted by Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) and asked all the participants to ensure consistency in the interview process and clarity of phenomena. These included:

- What roles did you perform prior to attending college?

- What about your daily routine changed when you became a student?

- How have your relationships changed since becoming a student?

- What tools, if any, have you used to help you as a student?

As noted earlier, the entire interview protocol is listed in Appendix A. During the interview process, it was essential that I was a good listener. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that a researcher should be a "good listener rather than a frequent speaker during the interview" (p. 134).

The criteria selection of the interview participants, and a consistent interview process,

which was also flexible, allowed me to obtain rich data regarding the participants' transition experiences. Additionally, I recognized that some people were more vibrant in describing personal experiences than others (Marshall & Rossman 1999), and I used probing to contextualize the interview. With the permission of my participants, I digitally recorded each interview and then transcribed it for accuracy. The use of video recordings and transcriptions ensured that major patterns and ideas are documented. Digital recordings enable me to identify and constantly review key ideas in the interviews. I also used field notes to describe specific details, such as hand gestures, long pauses, and interruptions, which were noted by me immediately following each interview. Electronic versions of the transcripts were saved to a password-locked flash drive and will be secured for seven years, in keeping with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines before being destroyed. The printed transcripts and electronic recordings of the interviews were destroyed once the dissertation was approved.

Documents

Different sources of information should be employed as part of the research process to ensure that a research topic has a strong foundation. While interviews and field notes may provide a solid base for research, documents support closing gaps in the research. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) identified three categories of documents used by researchers: (a) personal documents, (b) official documents, and (c) popular culture documents. Patton (2015) expanded on the use of documents noting that finding, studying, and analyzing documents are a part of qualitative inquiry and can include excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from organizational, clinical, or program records; memoranda and correspondence; social media postings; official publications and reports; personal diaries; and open-ended written

responses to questionnaires and surveys. Documents help provide a better understanding of the phenomena through the data they contain.

Personal documents can include any first-person narratives that consist of the individual's actions, experiences, and beliefs (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Mackieson et al., 2019). Data from documents consist of excerpts from documents captured in a way that records and preserves the context (Mackieson et al., 2019; Patton, 2015). The analysis of documents is about shaping how social, cultural, and political events, together with individual and group understandings, help interpret what is said and written (Grbich, 2013). Participants were asked to complete three online journals. These journals became the narrative documents for research. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated that documents that the participants write themselves or are written about them could be included as data. The journals are documents that can be reviewed and analyzed for patterns.

 The length of each journaling was not restricted, but there was a topic for each journal process. For the first journal, each participant was asked to write about what influenced her decision to attend college after years of employment. This first journal entry, completed before the initial interview, helped to address the first central question: What is the lived experience of transitioning from employment to college for African American and Latinx women who are low-SES and first-generation students?

The second journal entry occurred at least one day after the interview, and the third journal entry occurred at least one-week post-interviews. The second and third aided in answering the second central question and sub-questions. For the second journal entry, each participant was asked to describe a significant experience that she had during her first semester in college. For the third journal entry, each participant described what college

success meant. The thought behind the order of the journal entries was that the first journal primed each participant to start thinking about the meaning of becoming a college student prior to completing the interview. The hope was that this topic might allow me to draw out richer information during interviews. The second journal entry enabled participants to reflect on an experience that occurred during their first semester of college. This journal entry occurred after their interviews and capture experiences not remembered during interviews. The third journal entry, concerning college success, was at least one-week post-interview and was used to validate the in-person virtual interview.

The journals were completed online through Qualtrics, an online survey tool. Having participants complete the journals online removed the need to have the data transcribed and helped to ensure that my presence or verbal directions did not influence data. The journals were included in the section of the interview transcript to validate information gathered during the interviews. Once downloaded and included in the transcripts, the online journals were deleted. The downloaded journals will be saved on a password-protected flash drive and kept for seven years.

It is important to note here that all six participants completed the first journal prior to the interview. The second and third journals were completed by five of the six participants. The participant who did not complete the second and third journals was asked to do so on four separate occasions. While the two journals were not complete, the participant's first journal and interview are included as part of this study.

Observations

Observation can be an essential tool in qualitative research, even more so in post-intentional phenomenology (Patton, 2015; Vagle 2018). Patton (2015) noted that the purpose

of observations is to take the reader into the setting, observed through depth and detail to become the eyes, ears, and senses for the reader. Angrosino (2005) stated:

> Observational researchers traditionally have attempted to see events through the eyes of the people being studied. They have been attentive to seemingly mundane details and to take nothing in the field setting for granted. They were taught to contextualize data derived from observation in the broadest possible social and historical frame, all without overgeneralizing from a necessarily limited (and probably statistically nonrepresentative) sample. (p. 734)

Observation is not merely seeing; it is understanding what is seen and interpreting it in a manner that can be understood by those individuals examining the research. Observations helped to complete the telling of the narrative of a story.

Patton (2015) highlighted ten strengths to high-quality observations: (a) rich description, (b) contextual sensitivity, (c) being open to what emerges, (d) seeing the unseen, (e) testing old assumptions and generating new insights, (f) opening new areas of inquiry, (g) delving into sensitive issues, (h) getting beyond selective perceptions of others, (i) getting beyond one's own selective perceptions, and (j) experiencing empathy. The continuous goal of developing observational field notes in conjunction with interviews and documents was to evoke empathy, which supports experiencing the context of the study and the thick description of its findings. Moustakas (1994) reminded researchers to be descriptive in taking field notes by using a variety of information and perspectives, while Grbich (2013) was very direct concerning the role of researchers:

> Your role as a researcher is traditionally that of a 'neutral' distant reflective observer meticulously documenting observational and visual images and asking questions in both informal conversations and formal interviews, in order to identify, confirm, and cross-check an understanding of the societal structures, the social linkages, and the behavior patterns, beliefs, and understandings of people within the culture. (p. 42)

Observations were vital in connecting the research and understanding cultural dynamics and diversity into the process. Observations allowed me, as the researcher, to guard against a myopic view of the data.

Observations notes were kept in a personal post-reflecting journal and completed as soon as interviews were completed while the information was fresh in my mind. The observations were transcribed the same day they were completed to ensure that the information was accurately represented, and details were not missed. No personal information about the participant being observed was included in the journal. The observation protocol can be found in Appendix D.

Data Analysis Procedures

Large amounts of data can be produced in a qualitative study. As such, researchers must utilize systemic ways of reviewing the data specific to each type (i.e., interviews, documents, observations). The research questions and sub-questions were explored through transcripts of the data, as noted in Table 4, which follow the post-intentional process as laid out by Vagle (2018).

Table 4

Research Question Source

Central Research Questions	Sub-Questions	Data Source
What is the lived experience of transitioning from employment to college for African American and Latinx women who are low-SES and first-generation students?	• What motivates them to become college students after years of employment? • How do they articulate their experiences related to transitioning to college?	• Transcripts from individual interviews. • Participants written journals. • Researcher's observation journals.
What the is the essential structure in the meaning of attending college for African American and Latinx women who are low-SES and first-generation students?	• What are some of the experiences they identify as being significant during the first semester of college? • What does college success mean to them after their first semester of enrollment?	• Transcripts from individual interviews. • Participants written journals. • Researcher's observation journals.

The process for data review in post-intentional phenomenology is the same for interviews and documents, and it starts with developing a post-reflexion plan. The concept of post-reflexivity in post-intentional phenomenological research originates from the idea of bracketing in descriptive phenomenology and bridling in life-world research approaches, setting aside prior understanding. However, post-reflexion consists of exploring how prior knowledge, assumptions, and beliefs play a part in producing phenomena (Soule & Freeman, 2019; Vagle, 2018). Post-intentional phenomenology allows researchers to try out different frames and name assumptions. According to Vagle (2018), post-reflexion is a fluid process and occurs before, during, and after phenomenological materials are gathered and chronicled throughout the entire research process.

Post-reflexion started with a reading of participant journals, interview transcripts, and notes from observations. I repeated asked myself what I heard during the interviews, read in participants' journals, and observed during the interview process that led to the development of my post-reflexion journal. As emphasized earlier in the text, Vagle (2018) then requires

one round of line-by-line reading of all the materials. The process then required that I begin a careful reading of the data into a dynamic and playful dialogue with the theories I elected to think with and the post-reflexions completed.

I used the four strategies Vagle (2018) offers as part of post-intentional reflexion for trying to see what I eventually saw. Strategy one required me to be mindful of moments when I instinctively connected or disconnected with what was being observed. Strategy two supported the acknowledgment of my assumptions and what I viewed as normative. Strategy three created a space to bottom line those assumptions I refused or were unable to shed. Strategy four gave me permission to accept those moments when I was shocked by what I observed. During the post-reflexion process, I explored the post-intentional phenomenon using theories. The first step in exploring the post-intentional phenomenon was deconstructing wholes in phenomenological material, how participants tell the story of transitioning to college.

Deconstructing the wholes is accomplished through the philosophical idea known as lines of flight and can be done through two forms of noticing (Vagle 2018). The two forms of noticing are demonstrated in Figure 4.3. During the first form of noticing, Vagle encouraged me to take stock of how my body and emotions, responded to questions about what seems to fit, what does not fit, and what might be learned about the phenomenon that is not yet thinkable. During the second form of noticing, Vagle challenged me to distinguish between the molar and molecular lines of flight. Molar lines served as a reference point for reality, and molecular lines activated and supported molar lines through individual and collective actions (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Vagle 2018). I then worked to understand the direction

of participants' thinking, questioned certainties, remained willing to embrace new theories, and allowed meanings to appear.

Figure 2

Post-intentional Data Analysis as Chasing Lines of Flight

Noticing #1 Actively look for ways that knowledge takes off.

- Lines of flight resist the tying down of lived experiences and knowledge - knowlege takes off in unanticipated ways.
- Carefully and persistently look at the whole-part-whole analysis and post-reflexive journaling.
- What does not seem to fit?
- What might be learned about the phenomenon that is not yet thinkable?
- How does the body and emotion respond?

Noticing #2 Distinguish lines of flight from other lines operating on me and the phenomenon

- Lines of flight are difficult to idenitify and sustain.
- Distinguish lines of flight with molar and molecular lines.
- When might I have retreated to either/or thinking
- Where might I appear certain of meaning?
- Where have I extended to something creative and intriguing, but then backed off?
- Where might I appear uncertain regarding meaning about ideas?

Note: Information for Post-Intentional Data Analysis as Chasing Lines of Flight based on Vagle (2018)

After working through the two noticing processes, it was important to start thinking with theory; thinking with theory provided the opportunity to make choices about theoretical concepts and ideas. I wanted to think about the reflexion and decide which lines of flight were presented (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Soule & Freeman, 2019; Vagle, 2018). At the onset of the research process, I selected theories that I anticipated would be needed to understand African American and Latinx women's experience of becoming college students. These theories included transition theory, racial identity development, and various other student development theories as described in Chapter 2. This part of the analytical process helped confirm the theories that remained relevant and consider additional theories as part of

the analysis. The element of the process was not just about selecting theories and making them fit the research (Soule & Freeman, 2019; Vagle, 2018). Thinking with theory supported demystifying the most appropriate theoretical concepts to acquire meaning for the phenomenon.

Before conducting interviews and throughout the entire study, I adhered to the post-reflexion plan that was developed, revisited, and expanded through the process. The post-reflexion plan helped to interrogate how my personal experiences intersected and framed what I observed. I also noted how additional observations of the video recordings of the interview, which included observing myself as part of the research, differ from what I initially believed to be true. By exposing and interrogating these experiences, I was able to minimize their influence on my analysis.

My initial post-reflexion plan included the following thoughts: (a) what were my assumptions about women, women of color, and their place within academia; are there places where my assumptions changed or evolved? (b) did I enter this process with the assumption that colleges and universities do not serve African American and Latinx women at the same level they serve men in this population? (c) do women perceive they are not served at the same level as men? (d) how will I feel if I discover my assumptions are correct or respond if assumptions are erroneous? I also used the journal to remind myself that I enter each space with my own gender and be mindful of how my gender influences what I see. These assumptions led me to think about the limitations, validity and reliability, and ethical concerns of my study and to construct my role as the researcher.

Limitations, Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

Limitations

Limitations are those influences that the researcher cannot control and must remain mindful of throughout the research process. These shortcomings cannot be controlled by the researcher and place restrictions on the methodology or conclusions. Bickman and Rog (2009) argued that the goal of qualitative research is not to eliminate bias but to identify strategies to control the bias, so it does not interfere with the validity of the study (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Maxwell (2013) explains bias as the "primary concern with understanding how particular researcher's values and expectations may have influenced the conduct and conclusion of the study and avoiding negative consequences of these" (p. 124).

There are three primary limitations that I remained aware of throughout the research process: (a) my gender; (b) my racial identity; (c) the location where the participants attended college; and (d) the size of the research populations. The most apparent limitation of the current study was that as a male researching the experiences of women, I was limited by my experiences. While I identify across other characteristics of the participants (racial, first-generation student, etc.), my gender created a blind spot that I needed to be continually mindful about throughout the process. The institution (MACC), where my participants attended college, was an urban community college and limited their experiences within the context of MACC. Additionally, the research is based on the experience of a small pool of participants and may not be applicable beyond the experiences of the women who participated in the study. Neither the specific population nor the location of the study negated the validity of the current research; it only highlighted the limits to its broad transferability (Maxwell, 2013).

Validity and Reliability

Patton (2015) noted that validation of a study involves moving back and forth between data, inquiry-generated insights, and creative synthesis to identify meaning, accuracy, and validity, which leads to understanding the substance of the phenomenon of inquiry. Creswell and Poth (2018) depict validity as "…an evolving construct with a broad understanding of both traditional and contemporary perspectives [which] is essential for qualitative researchers" (p. 254). Lincoln and Guba (1985) revealed that "since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter (p. 316). A test for validity is also a test for reliability, often described as dependability in qualitative research and the stability of data over time and conditions (Grbich, 2013). Multiple forms of data contribute to validity, performed through data collection of interviews, journals, and observations. While the use of triangulation has often been used to describe the validity of a study, Richardson (1997) stated understanding of traditional notions of validity is needed. "Triangulation assumes that there is a fixed point or object that can be triangulated but in post-modernist mixed genre text, crystallizations take place not triangulation" (p. 934); enabling researchers to see the finer elements of the data as they would view the surface of a crystal.

From Vagle's (2018) perspective, validity is about the researcher seeing with frames and the clarification of seeing. Dependability is an evaluation of the quality of the data collection, data analysis, and theory generation (Grbich, 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985) described dependability as the notion of reliability in qualitative research. Reliability, according to Merriam (2009), assumes that there is a central reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results. Maxwell (2013) describes reliability as the degree to which the results accurately represent the participants under study. Reliability asks, if the

study is repeated, what are the chances of obtaining the same data and results? What reliability cannot take into consideration is the role of the research in post-intentional phenomenological research. In short, who I am as a researcher fundamentally changes how I perceive the world. However, my roles as a researcher required that I worked to improve the reliability and dependability of this study.

To evaluate the dependability of this research study, I used the following methods: (a) inquiry audit, (b) reading and reading the data, and (c) a post-reflexion plan. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that the use of the inquiry audit was one measure by which to enhance the dependability of qualitative research. As an inquiry audit, I had multiple individuals review my findings and link these with the procedures of post-intentionality. One was my principal advisor for this study, and the others were members of my research committee. None of the individuals participated in the interview process, and all contributed independent reviews of the research data. My advisor reviewed my initial findings, asked questions, and provided insight to clarify my thoughts. She challenged me to spend time interrogating prior research, integrating empirical literature, and gave feedback about the data analysis process. She encouraged me to consider various options or ways to present my findings.

To ensure dependability, I conducted a cross-reference of participant experiences to explore when and if specific lines of flight intersected for saliency. I requested feedback from the interview participants, member checking about the accuracy of profiles that were created through the post-reflexion process. After these checks were made, the results revealed that aspects of the current research continued to be valid over time. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four essential criteria for quality qualitative research: (a) confirmability, (b) credibility, (c) dependability, and (d) transferability of the study. The above strategies, along

with crystallization, gave me the tools necessary to ensure trustworthiness and quality in my research.

Patton (2015) noted that "crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic" (p. 689). Crystallization allowed me, as the researcher, to suspend the process of reviewing data and spend time in reflection of the analysis of data to ensure that all lines of flight were part of the review process. Finally, reading the narratives to get a more precise sense of what is happening yielded crystallization commonalities (Ellingson, 2009; Miles et al., 2013). Crystallization considers the current research framework from various perspectives so that the final work provides a better understanding of the phenomenon.

Ethical Concerns

In 1974, the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research was created. In 1979, the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research prepared what is now known as the Belmont Report ("Report"). The Belmont Report seeks to support fundamental ethical principles. The goal of the Report is to resolve underlying ethical problems surrounding research subjects. As a researcher, it was my duty to ensure that three basic ethical principles are adhered to while conducting my research: respect of person, beneficence, and justice. Respect of the person was ensured through informed consent, which is included in Appendix C. Beneficence was achieved through a full assessment of the risks and benefits of the research to the subjects. Justice was affirmed in the fair procedures and outcomes in the selection of the research subjects.

To conduct the current research with ethical integrity, I also needed to take several steps to protect my participants during the study. First, I needed to obtain the mandated approval from the Social Science Institution Review Board (IRB) at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and follow the guidelines set by the IRB to protect the confidentiality of my participants. Second, I had to secure approval from the institution where the participants were selected. Third, I disclosed the nature of my study to the participants, had each participant give verbal consent at the beginning of the interview process to voluntarily participate in this study. Fourth, I removed comments from the transcripts that the participants deem to be off-the-record to maintain the authenticity of the interviews. Following the interviews, I o provided transcripts of the conversations to each study participant to ensure that the interview content was accurate.

Role of the Researcher

It is essential that the researcher accurately and consistency comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that shape their interpretations and approach to the study (Creswell, 2018). When conducting interviews, I worked to understand my privilege. Despite coming from a low-SES background, my education has given me a certain amount of opportunity that must be acknowledged. As a researcher, I shared as little about my personal experience as necessary during the interviews so as not to encourage the interviewees to give me the information that I was seeking.

Post-intentional research encourages researchers to be mindful of their backgrounds (Soule & Freeman, 2019; Vagle, 2018). Understanding how I saw myself and my impact on the current research helped me be mindful of becoming who I am and how my experiences influenced my research. I have long tried to define myself, to understand who I am and where

I hope and intend to be in the future. I have realized that there are two ways of seeing and experiencing the world; the first encourages doubt. It works to burden and tie me to my lesser self.

The second way of seeing has become my sounding board. This way of seeing was meant to empower me and those around me. It has challenged me to stand in the void between what is and the possibilities of what might be. The clarity in this way of seeing has been refined by my education, ability to access resources, and move toward a better future.

As many first-generation and other at-risk students enter college, access to resources can be a precursor to their success. Specifically, student success can be affected positively or negatively by the availability and access to identifiable resources. By acknowledging my struggles with access and my desire to be a successful student, I understood how the desire for true access influenced my expectations that resources are available and accessible to others.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodology used for the current study. It highlighted the purpose and design of the study, processes of the data collection, processes for the data analysis, including limitations, validity, reliability, and ethical issues. My role as a researcher describes my positionality and internal communication to avoid influencing participants. The methodology was designed to provide an accurate description of the lived experiences of women as they move from employment to college. Throughout the research process, I was mindful of my own experiences as a nontraditional student and to keep the experiences of my participants the focus of the study and data analysis process. The findings and conclusions

are delineated in chapter 5. In chapter 6, I provide implications of findings and areas for

future research.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Many higher education administrators lack knowledge related to nontraditional African American and Latinx women's voices and representation in the literature about college transition and success. The purpose of this post-intentional inquiry (Vagle, 2018) with the use of narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was to explore the lived experiences of six African American and Latinx women who returned to college after multiple years of working in and outside the home. As outlined in previous chapters, the telling of their stories was informed by several theories, which included student development theories (Strayhorn, 2016; Tinto, 1993), transition theory (Schlossberg et al., 1989), racial identity development (Carter, 2006; Hurtado & Carter, 1997), and feminist theories (McFee, 2018) of both African American (Hein, 2017; Breines, 2007; Beauboeuf-Lafontant; 2002; hooks, 1995; Walker, 1983) and Latina//Chicana feminism (Monzó, 2014; Moya, 2001; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983).

The problem I addressed was the sheer lack of nontraditional-aged African American and Latinx women's voices and representation in the literature about college transition and success. My two central research questions (CRQ) and corresponding questions were:

CRQ1: What is the lived experience of transitioning from employment to college for African American and Latinx women who are low-SES and first-generation students?

 (a) What motivates them to become college students after years of employment?

 (b) How do they articulate their experiences related to transitioning to college?

CRQ2: What is the essential structure in the meaning of attending college for African American and Latinx women who are low-SES and first-generation students?

(a) What are some of the experiences they identify as being significant during the first semester of college?

(b) What does college success mean to them after their first semester of enrollment? I interviewed six African American and Latinx women about their experiences when they returned to college after multiple years of working in and outside the home. Three of the participants were African American and three were Latinx. Latinx women most often identified themselves as Latinas. Five of the six participants were mothers. All six provided some support for members of their families. Five of the participants, three African American and two Latinx, were current students. The sixth participant had recently completed her degree at MACC. One African American and one Latinx participant were mothers to children under the age of 12. Three participants self-identified as empty nesters, and one participant without children of her own was engaged to someone; this cross-section of women allowed for varied and rich stories that contributed to how I understood their experiences of becoming and being students.

For context, the interviews occurred during the time the world was faced with the COVID 19 pandemic. While the pandemic limited face-to-face in-person interactions, the use of Zoom afforded me the opportunity to go back and watch portions of each interview, over and over, until I was confident of which line or lines of flight were being expressed. In the end, I spent dozens of hours with participants, while I read their words, listening to their stories, and watched them express their ideas.

Validity of Study

To increase the validity of this research, I offered each participant the ability to review their transcripts of the interview. None of the participants accepted my original offer,

but two asked that they be informed when the process was completed. However, once I had completed the participant profiles and identified specific quotes that were included in the study, I sent the profile to each participant for review. Five of the six participants responded. Amber agreed with the profile I developed for her, additionally, she made a few minor edits to quotes related to language differences. Marie made a few adjustments to her quotes because she felt she had said "um" too much during the interview. Sonya, who originally had a different pseudonym, Virginia, like what I said about her, but wished she had a "cooler pseudonym" and that she was a much better writer than speaker. I offered her the opportunity to select another pseudonym and she chose Sonya because it means wisdom.

To ensure the validity of my process. I spent a great deal of time affirming and reaffirming the points with the research process where I observed take-off points and where lines of flight came into being. As noted in Chapter 4, the use of Zoom allowed me to go back and watch portions of the interviews to confirm my seeing. I often reminded myself, throughout the process, that I did not see the beginning of participants' stories; I entered in the middle (Vagle, 2018) and was not provided the opportunity to review what came before or would come after. Post-intentional research required that I be mindful of what occurred on and along the edges of an experience. I read, reread, walked away, and read again and was able to affirm my interpretation of the information provided by the participants. I constantly reminded myself that the stories I needed to relay were not my own. I was the steward of these stories. The participants trusted that I would present an honest reflection of their lived experiences.

Reflections about the Process

As a post-intentional researcher, I crafted text that engaged the productions and provocations of post-intentional phenomenon (Vagle, 2018). To be clear, my process was not to identify themes, but rather to explore the places where the data took flight. That is not to say that I did not notice commonalities across experiences. As part of my process, I identified where lines of flight were influenced by similar experiences or led to similar choices or outcomes. Throughout the process, I was committed to noticing the moments where there was a take-off point or where structures of their stories flowed or swelled, and I paid closer attention to how such intensities came in and through their experiences.

I originally approached my research with an interest in the voices of women who, through their stories, changed the ways they accessed spaces. Due to the lack of research focused on the experiences of African American and Latinx women as they entered college, I saw the advantage in completing research on individuals who attended to other life priorities before they attended college. Through this process (a) I learned more about the lived experience of women who transitioned from employment to college; (b) I kept an open mind and listened to stories that were not my own; (c) I learned what college success meant to these African American and Latinx women. Through this process, I spoke with some amazing women and learned about their college experiences from a unique lens.

While there was an initial challenge in acquiring the desired number of participants, I was pleasantly surprised by how forthcoming the participants were about their experiences. As a male, I am an outsider seeking access to the inner thoughts of proud, hardworking women, who were at varying stages in their lives. Additionally, I was surprised by the inclusive way some of the participants spoke of Black and Brown women who they felt

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sometimes faced similar obstacles to success. These women expressed the need to embrace and surround other women who navigate college for the betterment of their children and their families.

I have reflected on the development and implementation of this study with a discussion of challenges and surprises that occurred. Next, I report on the findings for each participant, beginning with individual profiles that illustrate an overall analysis of data sources for each, i.e., journals, interviews, and observations. I point out an analysis of intersections of experiences using tables followed by a summary of conclusions guided by the research questions. Important to note I used pseudonyms for participants and those they named as individuals or institutions in their data.

Findings

The discussion of findings was based on participant interviews, journals, and my personal commentary provided through the field notes from interviews, documents, and observations. I read each transcript numerous times and revisited interview voices and video recordings. As part of my reflexion plan, the three journal prompts were derived from the interview script and were included in the section of the interview transcript that directly corresponded to the journal prompt. This allowed me the opportunity to review the journal in the context of the interview transcript, as opposed to being separate stand-alone documents. I also looked at the videos multiple times to observe the body language and non-verbal gestures of participants as well as myself as part of the research. I wanted to understand how my interpretations of the data differ from what I originally believed to be true. By exposing and interrogating these experiences, I was able to minimize their influence on my analysis.

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For the findings, I used the information I gathered during the post-reflexion process of the interview transcripts, journal entry, and my observations of each participant to explore each of the three lines of flight. Each data set was reviewed first to analyze how things connected – line of flight one; what was continually being constructed – line of flight two; and the decision to join or not to join – line of flight three. A visual representation, of these lines of flight, was demonstrated in Figure 1 of Chapter 4.

Participant Profiles and Analysis

Participant 1: Amber:

Amber was an African American mother of two young children. Prior to becoming a student, she spent most of her time working outside the home. Before becoming a student Amber's typical day was working 12 to 14 hours a day. After work, she would attend to the needs of other family members, including an aging grandmother. Amber considers herself to be well organized and focused. She loved her community and would spend several hours a week in service to that community. Her day would end at 8:00 or 9:00 pm with prepping food and preparing to "repeat the cycle over again" the next day.

After Amber started to attend college, she realized that she could not continue what she called the vicious cycle of "work, work, work," take care of family, and volunteer. Education became a priority to Amber, and her relationships with her friends, family, and co-workers needed to change. She was a dedicated mother and did not want to go back to school to interrupt her ability to be that good mother. She texted co-workers on occasion to stay in touch and she noted family needs outside of her home became secondary priorities. Additionally, Amber is the only married participant in the study.

First line of flight: How thing connect (Fluid; shapeshifting; continually on the move)

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Amber's story revealed two clear representations of the first line of flight (a) the connection between college attainment and how it would help to shape a better future for her and her family and (b) that college success was a journey, and her determination moved the journey forward. I noted in my observation, Amber had a look of determination when she spoke of doing better financially. I noted that she had a similar look when she spoke of the journey, she traveled to obtain a college education.

For Amber, there was a clear connection between how the completion of her education had the potential to change her personal status and that of her family. For instance, when Amber reflected on her life prior to attending college she commented about the price of working endlessly and going it alone had on her she said:

> "I just worked – work, work, work, because I needed to. I had to, and I just had to and that's what kept me afloat. Working not depending on any relative for anything. I mean I did get the support of just knowing that they're there if you needed to talk to someone. The support of, if there is, you know, someone celebrating a birthday or death or whatever the case is. You were there, but that's it."

Amber later noted, within one of her journal entries that attainment of an education, however, would change that perspective. She noted that:

> "College success would mean that I can now actively seek out a better way to earn, to provide for myself, my children, my family, and those in need within my community."

In one space, without working toward a degree, Amber's focus was on work with the need to provide for her family. In the other space, her future ability to provide would become easier and what she will be able to give to her family will be enhanced by the benefits of her education.

During the interview, Amber was asked what made her a successful student and one of the journal prompts asked her what college success meant to her. In the interview, she

began by connecting college success to getting a grade above a "C" and ended by speaking

about the journey within the process of being a student. Amber stated:

> "I want to be a successful student. I don't know that I am. I'm just...I'm just grateful for anything above a C. [when it comes to college success] I'm not there yet. I'm a successful student when I would have completed the journey. And it's not necessarily the journey, it's the process within the journey."

Amber continued this idea of connecting college success with the process of becoming and

being a student to reach an end result, in her journal entry. Amber wrote:

> "The scholastic definition does not have any merit to what college success means to me. College success means that I would have done all that was asked and required of me by the institution. And that I am now in a position to apply to a four-year institution if I desired to…College success means to me that I did the work."

Second line of flight: What is continually being constructed (Cultured; gendered; socially classed)

When I examined Amber's story for the second line of flight, aspects of student

development, feminist and womanist theories, and social capital were prevalent in her story.

Amber's story leaked ideas about persistence and attrition. In my observation, I noted that

Amber wanted to be successful and that the desire for persistence weighed heavily against

the ability of the college to support her and the current rate at which her personal attrition

occurred. This specific aspect of the second line of flight was noted during the interview

when asked about what being a student would help her to achieve. Amber stated:

> "Patience...it's true patience. I hope that it allows me to achieve the drive to go to my next degree. I hope that I don't lose my like for schooling. And academics growth doesn't phase out because of how overwhelmed I am with the volume and the very little communication that you're getting from the institution or support or whatever the case is. I hope that my like or my desire for going to the next chapter doesn't just blow out just because I'm burnt out."

Amber expanded on the idea of the role of the institution in the second journal entry which asked her to describe a significant experience she had during her first semester of college. When she spoke of the day, she went to the college to register for her first semester of classes. I noted in my post-reflexion of her journal that for Amber, the idea of being a mother and the responsibility of that role echoed in the journal when she wrote:

> "I was a new mother with a baby a few weeks old. I needed to meet with my advisors. I did not want to cancel because I kept putting off college for far too long. So, I strapped my baby in the car seat we arrived, waited, then waited some more. Finally, my name was called, or at least an attempt of my name [her real name] was uttered. At this time, I needed to breastfeed my baby. I inquired from the [advisor], with whom I was sitting in front of, as we were mapping out courses that would help me grow as a student. The advisor (a male) said that I can use the public restroom. I asked if they had a much more sanitized environment. He said, no. He made a call, not sure to whom but, nothing was done. It never occurred to him to leave his office so I could have fed my now crying child. I became upset and wanted to quit even continuing further. Then across the hall, another advisor (female) allowed me to use the EMPTY conference room that was adjacent to his. This still makes me upset to even share this now...humans."

I also noted in my post-reflexion that this example, not only spoke to the college's role to support her as a student, but it also spoke of her womanist identity, specifically as it relates and the college's role in being mindful of the women it served. This is reflective of Smith's (2017) assertion that an important aspect of being a womanist is in truth-telling and speaking to injustice. Her womanist identity was also apparent during her interview when she took a moment to speak about how credits and degrees work, and their impact on moving forward.

> "[Colleges] are requiring you 60 credits [for an associate degree]. Why? I personally feel the further you go up academically, is the harder the decline should be. And I can see why a lot of my Latinx and Brown and Black people, women, just quit college. 'Cause it's a lot to juggle and you never get 60 credits in these two years that they talk about. They need to stop putting that out there."

Amber expressed ideas of social capital when she spoke of the easiest part of becoming a student. In telling her story, Amber spoke of how easy it was to just apply for

college. She first spoke of not being sure as to why she waited, and what she did instead of applying for college. She then went on to speak about the value of getting a degree.

> "The easiest part would have been that day I walked into the institution and signed up. That was the easiest part because I don't know what was holding me back, directly or indirectly, I always chose, let me work, let me give this, or let me work, let me get this bill paid. And then I'm like even though being able to pay a bill (s) is great, to have your academia at the end of the day - I don't have a skill that I can fall back on that can buffer me. So, I needed to do…you know either work less or not work at all and just try to finish this...this journey with school because it will help me in the future. So, it's a small price to pay. Don't get me wrong, it's a large sacrifice to not work and to not receive an income, but the end result (acquiring my degree) is priceless! There is nothing better than that."

Third line of flight: Decision to join or not join (stances; intensities; movement)

In my post-reflexion of Amber, I noted a few different times when she decided to join, not join, or remove herself in some way. When she spoke of her experience of how her relationships changed, she noted that she decided to give up time. She first noted that she just could not do all the things she did before becoming a college student. She went from chatting with friends and colleagues all the time to texting them randomly and her role with family and as a student continued to evolve.

> "I'm still in contact with my work colleagues. We text all the time, well not all the time, we text randomly every now and again. With my family, it's still present 'cause, you know, you were born into them. You can't edit or delete - even when they're gone forever. You're still stuck with them. It hasn't changed much. I would say it is pretty much the same, they are there and I'm here and we interact...So, I'll call to make sure they're OK and I'll Mail a package, but I can't do as much as I used to."

When Amber spoke about the process of becoming a student, the idea of joining, of being a part of the institution, Amber thought of communication, and the way the college communicated impacted her desire to become a student and impacted her ability/desire to request help. I noted in my observation when Amber answered the question about her greatest challenge of becoming a student, Amber's voice was filled with frustration. I was

particularly impacted by her thoughts about the wrong people. Amber begins by saying that

the most difficult part of being a student was the work, but she quickly changed her mind.

> "The work, the requirement." She took a breath here and reflected. "The biggest challenge also is with my institution. I can speak for where I'm currently going, they aren't very communicative. There's...there's a lack of real communication. And because you're in college, and because you're an adult they think 'well you should know' but no. This is the institution I'm coming to for help and prior to the pandemic, there was very little support. And the guidance counselor, and all these advisers, all these kinds of staff, they're just words, or maybe they're attached to the wrong human. That's probably it. So that was some of my challenges. And then the second challenge would be not enough support. Not enough support from the institution to help us now [post-pandemic]. I don't need to be spoon-fed, but there's a little tweaking that can be done."

Later, when asked what she might say to her college, Amber continued to provide

information as to how the institution might welcome people into spaces.

> "Be kind. It's simple. just...we're coming from all various walks of life. Some of us are immigrants, some of us are not, but either which way, when one human being approaches you, another human, to ask for help or guidance or direction - just listen. Just be kind. And kindness doesn't mean that you cannot be direct or honest or anything of such. It just means just listening and responding to the person the way you would have wanted someone to respond to you. It's just this simple."

Participant 2: Sonya

Sonya was a Latinx mother with two young sons and worked as a surgery tech at a

local hospital. She tried to go to college right out of high school, but it was not the right fit

for her at the time. Instead, she joined the workforce. She did some technical schoolwork for

a certificate to assist her with her work. Her mom lived with her and her two sons. She had a

"boyfriend", but their relationship was long-distance.

Sonya made the decision to go back to college knowing that her work would help to

pay the cost. She also had a desire to change the experience her two boys could have by

showing them college is possible. She seemed to have a great support system with her

colleagues at work, who encouraged her to return to college. Sonya was very thoughtful in

answering questions; she would often restate the question and then move forward with her

answer. I noted this during her interview and as part of her journal entries.

First line of flight: How thing connect (Fluid; shapeshifting; continually on the move)

Sonya made a clear connection between getting a degree and her role as a mother.

She wants to ensure that the future of her sons was not one hindered by mountains of debt.

When Sonya completed her first journal entry, before our interview, she wrote:

> "I am a single mother of two very young men. My decision to pursue college after years of employment was based on them. I realized that they were getting closer to high school and I needed a way to help them pay for college so that they wouldn't graduate with an insane amount of debt. I want them to live comfortably, not like how I grew up. I wanted to show them that nothing is impossible or too late. If they see me working hard in school, then that might motivate them. Having worked for so many years and being so miserable in low-paying jobs, I realized the only way I could get more was to do more."

Sonya also noted a connection between not having a degree and feeling stuck. She

recognized her role as a parent and someone who worked hard and did not like the idea of

being stuck. Additionally, Sonya equated her level of intelligence and ability to learn with

her age. When telling about how she saw herself before becoming a student Sonya talked

about the way she spoke to herself:

> "Okay, so before becoming a student, I had felt very stuck. I felt like I was already a parent for years. And unless you go to school, you're not really going to get ready for the future. Like, there almost aren't any real jobs that actually pay like a living wage. That will allow you to not just live comfortably for yourself or just be able to support yourself, but support other human beings, you know."

> "So, without going to school I constantly felt like this isn't enough, like you know this isn't. I shouldn't have to live like this. Like I shouldn't have to live hand to mouth or paycheck to paycheck. Why can't I go on a basic vacation to like Wildwood, you know. I'm not trying to go far, you know. Like, I'm not trying to go to China or Brazil or something. I just want to go to Wildwood. I felt like, really, really, stuck. Just, um defeated like. And I got to the point where I was like, you know, I'm too old, you know, to go back to school. I like don't know what I'd even be doing sitting next to a bunch of kids, like you know half my age, you know I you know feel really dumb."

Later during the interview, Sonya spoke about how successful she was as a student, but that part of her story belongs to a different line of flight. I did note in my post-reflexion, that I wanted to speak up and say something, to remind her of how worth a person she was. However, my role was to listen with the goal of understanding; an insertion of my thoughts about her story could have potentially changed the rest of the interview. It was also a good reminder for me and other qualitative researchers, that our role was to observe the world and allow meaning to present itself, not to change was what observed through our opinions.

Second line of flight: What is continually being constructed (Cultured; gendered; socially classed)

When I examined Sonya's story for aspects of the second line of flight it was evident, that while aspects of student development were present, racial identity, Latina/Chicana feminist theory, and social capital most readily revealed themselves. Social capital was an important part of Sonya's experience. As she told her story, she often entwined racial identity and Latina/Chicana feminist theory with ideas of social capital. This intertwining was noted by Moya (2014) who highlighted that you cannot speak Latina/Chicana feminism without an understanding of race and culture. I noted earlier that Sonya returned to college to ensure a better future for her children. When she spoke of what she hoped being a student would help her to achieve, Sonya made an amazing analogy of starting a race in the basement:

> "Well, I hope at some point being a student will help me achieve a better-paying job. That is one of the reasons but not the sole reason. I want to be able to move my sons to a higher class. I think every, every generation is supposed to do better than the one before. And being Hispanic specifically…but no I mean not just Hispanic, but someone from any Black or Brown community. Black and Brown people have that same struggle that we've always been struggling. From starting in the basement. Everyone else starts the race at a different step, like at a different part of the relay. But we've [the Black and Brown people] always started in the basement.

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Like we had to now get to the first floor before we can even start running. And it's always been an uphill battle."

"So, I feel like you know, if I can get…if me being a student helps me get to where I need to be financially, and happier as a nurse, at a better position, then I can make sure that my sons can start from the first floor at least. And that I can pay for their school so that they don't have to graduate with all this debt. They can be in line with everybody else that's not having all this debt. I don't understand, people are like oh yeah, my parents paid for me to go. This must be nice. It must be nice because the rest of us have to work. And we have all this debt and everything. And I want my sons to have the same opportunities that they're supposed to have, you know what I mean. Like I honestly feel like school, in general, is way too much money. It shouldn't be as much money as it is, but it is. So, you know you work with what you got. And I'm hoping that being a student definitely you know provides me an opportunity to get to where I need to be so that I can get my sons where they need to be."

Sonya continued to reveal aspects of social capital in her third journal entry concerning the meaning of college success. I noted in my post-reflexion of the data that Sonya seemed to turn inward and have a moment of introspective when she said:

"College success to me means that I would have a ticket to play in the game of life. It means struggling less, for me and my children. It means I finally proved to myself that I could do it despite having done it so late."

Aspects of Sonya's story, that related to student development theory came to light while I listened and read about what made her a successful student. Sonya noted qualities that clearly connected to the ideas found in attrition. In telling of her success, Sonya speaks of how she prepared for class, how she planned her semester, and how she was mindful of aspects of life that hindered her success.

"What makes me a successful student? I think my internal drive to do better for myself and for my son's, definitely contributes to it. You have to want it. You have to want it. I mean, especially when you have so many things that could derail you at any moment, you know your work…your children any anything, any minor thing that goes wrong with an illness or something like that. Not necessarily with you, but definitely with them. Anything can derail you in your life, a boyfriend or girlfriend that says they need more of your time and then you end up feeling guilty. And then you end up neglecting one over the other. You've gotta want it. You've got

to know that you shouldn't necessarily think of certain things as a sacrifice in order to do it, but part of the process."

"There were some days where I'm like, man, I'm such a terrible mom because I haven't spent much time with my sons. Then I go to look at it as well, man, I'm such a great mom because I'm doing this so that they don't have to struggle in the future. So, I'm definitely keeping that kind of positive insight into not sacrificing things, but contributing to a higher purpose like contributing to a greater good for yourself and for them and for a relationship or for whatever. You've got to have the determination to keep going on, even though some things may not always go the right way. At that moment, I just keep going, like even just a little bit at a time. Like my friends at work told me, they said, 'look even if you do one class at a time. Just don't stop. Just keep going and eventually it will have to end. It can't go on forever just one class at a time and you can do one class. Maybe test the waters on two see how you might feel then.'"

Third line of flight: Decision to join or not join (stances; intensities; movement)

Throughout Sonya's story, she spoke about her decision to join and to make

movement through her actions. I recorded in my post-reflexion process that I thought Sonya

could do anything once she set her mind to do it. This idea of *can do anything* revealed itself

and played out in one of the best examples of the third line of flight. In her second journal,

Sonya described a significant experience that occurred during her first semester. Sonya

wrote:

"I had never given much thought to sociology, all I knew was that it was a prerequisite, and from what I was told it didn't have overly difficult material. I had zero expectations about the course. I would soon realize how important the course would be and how relevant to me it was. I can remember reading an assignment on the social class system, and thinking... This system was all designed so that I couldn't get here, I'm not actually supposed to be here... So many aspects of life suddenly became so clear. And it was that clarity that gave me resolve. My educational journey started because I needed a better job to provide a stable life for my children. And here I was learning why my people and I are in this position in the first place. I was grateful in that moment that this course was a prerequisite. Without it, I would have spent my life thinking I just had bad luck. I learned how important it was for me to succeed. Every piece in the story had just came full circle and I was aware enough to understand it."

I noted in my post-reflexion, that Sonya had fully decided that she would no longer be on the outside looking in when she wrote:

> "Every piece in the story had just came full circle and I was aware enough to understand it."

During her first semester of college, in that one entry-level prerequisite, she had become fully awake and aware.

Participant 3: Sheila

Sheila was an African American mother of two adult children and a recent grandmother of one. She became a mother during her teen years, but even prior to having children, she served as a parent to her siblings. While both a mother and grandmother, she identifies as being rather young. Sheila is an artist and lives with her fiancé.

Sheila had spent more than 20 years of her life working to reduce violence and to identify ways to support and assist children in the urban city where she lived. For her, going to college was about gaining credibility for the work she was doing. Her passion for youth and her city echoed throughout her story. After her interview, I wrote in my post-reflexion notes, she was putting so much energy into so many things, that I wondered how much she had left. After I revisited the interview and transcript along with the Zoom interview, I noted a sense of grit that I had missed during the initial interview. Sheila did not complete two of the journal entries and so they were not included in my review of her story.

First line of flight: How thing connect (Fluid; shapeshifting; continually on the move)

When I reviewed the transcript of Sheila's interview, I noticed that her life was about continually moving and becoming. She went from child to sibling caregiver, to teenage mother, to artist, to community organizer, to college student. An interesting thread and connection in Sheila's story, that spoke to the first line of flight, is how an education will

make her more creditable. Once she gained her education, the degree will give her some sense of legitimacy for the work she has been doing for more than 20 years.

> "I'm going back to school, because basically, I was starting to realize that people weren't taking my word, what I was analyzing, the things that I was witnessing in the community, seriously because I didn't have certain. You know paperwork. When I'm out there and I'm analyzing for them. Showing them exactly what I am noticing. Then there are too many times that people, who have taken my terminology, that I've created for certain situations and ran with them here in the city. And I just think that until I have, the right, you know, titles and education, they're going to keep doing that. So, this is to protect my, I guess, intellectual property."

Sheila revisited this idea in her journal entry about what influenced her to attend college. She wrote that as a young empty nester:

> "…with a desire to have the paperwork necessary to have my valid opinion be quantified as a serious perspective to consider. I have worked on ending youth violence for 20 years but without completing a degree my ability to be promoted is limited. My eldest child made me a young Grandmother a year ago. I want my Grandson to view a college degree as our family's norm…I am the only one without [a degree]. I must change this."

Second line of flight: What is continually being constructed (Cultured; gendered; socially classed)

At first, I had trouble noticing the second line of flight in a substantial way. I completed additional reflexions and read the transcript, reviewed Sheila's journal, and reviewed my observation notes several additional times. I asked if there were aspects of a theory or theories that made themselves known and I was not paying sufficient attention. I looked closely for something that flowed from the post-reflexions. In one of my final post-reflexions of Sheila's story, I asked what makes her identity so salient. It was through this questioning process that I began to reflect on ideas of womanism and being womanish. I realized that in my desire to have something clearly say, "this is what you've been looking for" I almost missed a key aspect of post-intentionality that required me to examine edges, to

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notice what was important about what Sheila revealed to me. Womanist is solely not about one moment in time in one situation but rather a combination of experiences that occur concurrently and over the span of a lifetime (hooks, 1991; Lorde, 1996; Smith, 2017; Walker, 1983)

When I considered the edges, I realized that, as an African American woman, Sheila echoed the sentiment of the many African American women who walked before her and beside her. She spoke of the validity of the work she did, of how she cared for her community that simultaneously saw her, and insists that she remained unseen. These ideas were specifically seen in the following excerpts from her storying. The additional post-reflexion allowed me to see that Sheila was a mother and a community builder.

> "I had all kinds of support. I had family support. I had friend support, I'm an artist, so I like I had a network of artists that were like 'we're gonna make me sure that your kids are going to be okay because you always looked out for us.' So, that really helped me a lot."

> "I've been working the last 20 years to reduce violence with us in the [City]. So, I'm very, very, passionate about the children of the City, and have been doing this for a long time."

I also noted the perception that she received a lack of recognition for the work being done.

> "I felt like I didn't have the tools. Like even, even with just being enrolled in school right now, with all the years of experiences in this field, just being enrolled means people give me, give me a second chance. That my tools are more valid."

> "I had to prove it to everyone else. Like I know I can do it. I need to do this [get this degree] so that I can help apply solutions. That what I say is legit. I mean if I go into this office, they can respect what I'm saying because I have the understanding that normalizes that support."

Had I not spent time dedicated to additional post-reflexions of Sheila's story, I would have missed an opportunity to allow a fuller version of her voice to come through.

Third line of flight: Decision to join or not join (stances; intensities; movement)

The third line of flight can be seen throughout Sheila's decision to return to college. The idea of joining the ranks of women who went before was easily identifiable when Sheila was asked if there was any additional information, she would like me to know. She engaged this opportunity and stated:

> "I am just excited to be and soon become one of the many [women attending college and getting a degree] because we are the largest growing, you know population of college-educated people. And I just can't wait to be a part of the number and see how much change we can affect from becoming degreed. This is going to change politics, this social landscape when we are now the most educated, you know, people. How big of a change especially, here in [my City] where we're a multiplying population."

This idea of becoming a student was also noted when Sheila was asked about one thing that she would say to the people who are at MACC. I watched, as if in reflection when she said:

> "Thank you for taking the time to explain things the way they do. I am really happy with [MACC] because they just seem to assume that you have something else going on; when they present anything or communicate anything. The team is really considerate of your time, your energy in your responsibilities. And I appreciate that. And my advisor alone has given me such a schedule and such a note of confidence that everything seems possible. Starting from this little community college and I appreciate that from them."

Participant 4: Frida

Frida was a 30-something Latinx woman. She had no children at the time of the interview and was not required to provide support for other family members. She worked as a 9-1-1 dispatcher, a job she started in 2008. In the past, she had worked as a police dispatcher and she was a trained emergency medical technician (EMT) but had made the choice not to work in the field. She was quick to remind me that she could have worked in the field, but it was not work that she enjoyed.

Frida returned to college to pursue a different career path. She stated that the only thing left for her, without a degree was to become a police officer and she never had a desire

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to become an officer. Not having a family of her own, provided Frida with some opportunities to experience life and the world. I thought it interesting that Frida worked hard during her 20's, primarily as a police dispatcher, and was able to do some traveling in her early 30's. Frida has a boyfriend and a dog that she loves.

First line of flight: How thing connect (Fluid; shapeshifting; continually on the move)

When I examined Frida's story for the first line of flight, I first looked at my observation of her interview. The interview itself was somewhat disjointed; she moved from one topic to another without me asking a different question. I was struck by how she was able to move in and between ideas that were all closely related to my guiding questions, but there were times I needed to go back to ask something that had been missed. In reflecting, I noticed that the way she told her story was like how she had lived her life. She moved from being a high school student to being a police dispatcher to being a 9-1-1 dispatcher, but somewhere in the middle, she trained to be an EMT. The college degree seemed to be another piece of the puzzle and when she spoke of college success Frida noted:

> "College success? Getting that degree, honestly, at the end of the day you know, as long as you have the degree, you have a better chance. Even though now it's like the more degrees you have, the better your options. Especially because I know people that have a master's and are making what I am making. You know what I mean - because of the job market. But if they really wanted to, they could make a change. They were overqualified for some positions than I will be because I don't have a degree. So, that college success, that degree, is like, what you need for sure."

Frida lived much of her life in the first line of flight. She spent much of her time in the search for the connections between an action and the desired outcome.

Second line of flight: What is continually being constructed (Cultured; gendered; socially classed)

For the majority of Frida's interview, she did not speak to many of the theories that were discussed in Chapter 2. However, at the end of the interview, I asked about any additional information that she wanted people to know, and the idea of being Latinx and Latina was revealed. Frida started to answer this question when she spoke about how she felt Latinx people valued education:

> "Especially with the Latinx community I guess you can say, we, you know, we don't pride ourselves a lot, I mean when it comes to education. I feel like in education, we're so used to the culture. Just getting in a relationship young. I kind of always told myself that I wasn't going to have kids young, and that's why I don't have children yet. You know, so it's like, I feel like we need to make, as Latina women, we need to make an effort to make education to be a priority. Especially coming out of high school, you know, because the opportunities are there especially now when there is such a need for so many bilingual people."

This was one of the few times during the interview where I noticed that Frida was animated about what she said. I noted in my post-reflexion that there was clear excitement in the way she told the story of education. I wanted to know if there was more that she wanted to say on the topic. So, after Frida made this statement, I made the comment, "a Latina friend of mine said that some Latina's do not go to college because brothers must go first." Frida responded:

> "That happened. I don't have brothers, so this didn't happen to me. But it's like, you know we [Latina's] don't talk about how important it is. And it's funny because my mom now has her degree, but she didn't really instill that idea about education. Things like staying in school. It is just like I think I know it was important. It wasn't like you need to get this degree you know. If our parents would just say it. You know. Also, when I have children, they're getting their degrees. I'm not saying it is an option. If I could back in time I would not wait this long."

I noted in my post-reflexion process that this was the point when Frida clearly claimed her identity as a Latina. This is also where I noted that Frida silently, but proudly waved a flag of Latina/Chicana feminist identity. Throughout the discourse of Latina/Chicana feminism is the good of the community reverberates and places a focus on the spaces of Latina/Chicanas

without forgetting the needs of the community (. Monzó, 2014; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983; Mayo, 2001)

Third line of flight: Decision to join or not join (stances; intensities; movement)

It was clear as I created my post-reflexions journal of Frida's interview, her journal entries, and my observation, that she made the decision not to join or move toward the ideas of being a student or to make changes that might impact her identity. When I thought with theory, there was evidence to say that Strayhorn's (2016) ideas of the responsibility of the institution to be actively aware of the needs of students are at play in Frida's decision not to join. When asked if there was one thing, she would like people at the college to know, Frida stated:

> "Like. Yeah. I feel like they need to like have better counselors. Why don't people stay in school - because the graduation rate is so low. And I think it's because you know people, especially in a big city like [this one]. A lot of us, especially when we're young we don't know what we're doing. I really didn't know what I was doing. Second, you know, back 20 years ago - Oh my god. You know, like, I feel like they need to be patient. I know they offer programs [for people new to college] but I feel like it needs to be better explained…There should be, like a class or something to help you. You know, to manage how you're going to have your college career. Because when I was in high school going into college, I chose the college just because. And I feel like I don't know this college is trying to do something better, at this point in general, just so we can make it. Not feel like this is just about a bunch of time to go to school. And it was hard. We have to actually, as an adult learner, we have to do all the work the same way as somebody who doesn't have a job. Or doesn't have, you know kids. I don't have kids, but you know, they do. And so, teachers aren't understanding, either. Like they're not very understanding. If you're an adult. You've still gotta do it."

Participant 5: Lynn

Lynn was an African mother of two adult children. Prior to her return to college, she worked with programs like the Federal TRIO program to support students and their desire to

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go to college. She performed administrative roles and was a private consultant. Lynn lived a life of service to her community and in her church.

Lynn had some medical issues that caused her to lose most of her sight and delayed her degree completion. She spent a lot of time healing and Lynn was finally at a place where she could return to school. Prior to her illness, Lynn had set high standards for herself and her success. She was president of an honor society and worked to support other adult learners, through group study efforts. She took pride in her self-determination to complete her academic journey.

First line of flight: How things connect (Fluid; shapeshifting; continually on the move)

The first line of flight was evident in a few areas of Lynn's life. Most evident was her desire to see people graduate, even at the detriment of her own education. Ultimately, however, Lynn wanted to create something, and college degrees were needed first. In my post-interview reflection, I noted that Lynn showed excitement when she spoke about how she supported other people so they could go to college or complete a degree. When she journaled about her decision to become a student, Lynn noted:

> "In short both my personal children and students I've coached to college said that I no longer had the excuse of young children or a marriage I was trying to hold together. They said I had a lot to bring to the table in terms of life experience. Not to mention that I had started and stopped with college several times and I wanted to finish, to complete something."

But it was not until Lynn told the story about the day that she signed up for her first college classes, that I understood her motivation to become a college student. As I noted earlier, Lynn was the mother of adult children. Her children were her world, those born to her, and those she supported on their journey to college. In a conversation about her change

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in routine, Lynn stopped and told me about a significant life event. Lynn, in a space of

reflection, stated:

> "I got a divorce, and then I stopped working, and I needed to go back to
> school. My mom just brought it back to my remembrance as something I always
> wanted to do. And at first, I was like, no I don't want to do it anymore, because when
> I want to do it I couldn't and now I don't want to do it anymore. It was kind of like a
> rebellion thing. I did want to do it [go back to school] and I was scared to do it. When
> I wanted to do it, I had the mind to do it, my brain was fresh, and I was working with
> students, too. Now, I am old, and it is not going to be right. And I don't want to do it.
> And I rebelled against it for a while. I had a conversation with my son who was at
> [Land grant university in the South], where we sent him, my youngest, and that
> conversation he said, 'Mom you know I love you.' He said it like five times. And I
> am like 'Yes, why do you keep saying it?' He said, 'because I am not going to talk to
> you ever again until you register yourself for school. Because you have been working
> to put a lot of kids in programs and you help to put a lot of kids through college. And
> when we went to boarding school, that was a perfect time for you to go back to school
> and you didn't. And now I am the last, and I am in college and you did it. And I am
> not going to talk to you until you get yourself registered for some kind of school and
> some kind of education and get yourself a degree.
>
> While I was talking to him on the phone, so my son does not mince words so
> if he says it, I have no qualms about it, he is that type of child when he makes up his
> mind. When he made up his mind about [Land grant university] he was in the eighth
> grade, who does that right, and then follows through. So, when he said that, as he was
> talking to me on the phone I got dressed, I didn't shower, I didn't do anything, I got
> dressed and when he hung up the phone with me, he did not know I was walking
> through the doors of the community college. And I sat with a counselor and said I've
> got to register somewhere, or my son is not going to talk to me. And before I left, I
> was registered for school. I took a snapshot of my registration form and I texted it to
> him and he sent me back a thumbs up and he started talking to me. It was some
> serious motivation."

I noted in my post-reflexion, Lynn talked a lot about what she had done for work and why

she was worked and supported others on their journey. Walker's (1983) definition of

womanist specifically notes that part of womanist is the act of being committed to "survival

and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (pp. xi-xii). It is not simply pulling one's

self through but that act and actions to bring the community in its entirety up. This, however,

was the moment I recognized the emotion behind her desire to become a student.

Second line of flight: What is continually being constructed (Cultured; gendered; socially classed)

The second line of flight existed in various ways in Lynn's story. She spent a lot of

time working to construct her ideal future. Something that echoed in Lynn's interview came

through when she was asked about what she hoped being a student would help her to

achieve. After she took a short moment to think Lynn stated:

> "Purpose and destiny. I am going to finish this degree in behavioral health and human services, something I worked in the field for, for thirty years. And then I am going to continue with a bachelor's and master's, in social work…Do I want to be a social worker, absolutely not, but what I am purposed to do is build an organization that can be all thing to all men. And I need to have a degree that qualifies me to hire people who can be in the positions I need them to be. In the areas, I need them to be. 'Cause I need them to provide service. And I know what the degree is going to tell the rest of the world, I already know it, it is going to tell the rest of the work that I have the paperwork and the experience to hire this staff to service those people."

I want to acknowledge that I recognized that Lynn's idea of creating something lacked

specific details. However, her motivation to do something, to become something more was

evident when she spoke about how her relationships had changed, since being a student.

Lynn immediately told the story of her granddaughter. Lynn proudly stated:

> "Oh, they [relationships] have changed. They have changed. Changed from the very basics. Let's start with my granddaughter, who will be four she is three. 'Grandmom, are you going to your school? I am going to my school. We're going to be smart together.' So early on she gets this princess training thing that says, 'school is cool and even my grandmom goes.' You know what I mean. And so, for her, my relationship is, and she made me cry yesterday 'cause we were in the market at the end of the day. and I am going down the market and it is the first time I am seeing her all day and she is saying 'Grandmom, how was your school today?' She is three and that is our conversation about school, and it is an excited one. And with her, it has enhanced our relationship and gives her, and it gives me chance to leave a legacy with her - forever how long I am with her. [A legacy] about the school being a positive thing."

When we study development theories, whether the theory is about student success, transition,

identity development, etc., we are continually reminded that development does not occur in a

linear fashion. Instead, we are mindful that development occurs circular, out of order, and

repeatedly, this repetitive process is reflected in the second line of flight and demonstrated

clearly through Lynn's experience.

Third line of flight: Decision to join or not join (stances; intensities; movement)

The third line flight came into clear focus as part of the interview and when she wrote

about a significant experience during her first semester. Relationships meant a great deal to

Lynn and they influenced her decisions, in the second journal, Lynn wrote:

> "While waiting to meet with the department head I met a professor who was
> in her office. She overheard my concerns about returning back to school. She was
> encouraging and she offered herself as a source of support. I later had her for a
> number of classes, where my life experiences working in the field not only helped me
> in my class but allowed me to help my classmates as well. Giving back is what I was
> born to do. And she helped me see how continuing my education was a part of that."

The way Lynn saw herself changed when she became a student. When she became a

college student, the transition helped her vision of herself to become a reality. When Lynn

was asked about how she saw herself after becoming a student Lynn stated:

> "A better person, of course, I have learned academically, but the most growth,
> the most knowledge acquired. The wisdom that would I applied to myself comes from
> nothing to do with what was taught in a classroom. It came from interactions with
> other students. It came from interactions with those positive staff people that I've
> met, and there are lots of those and faculty members. And those interactions and the
> relationships, and those networking were that biggest pieces, that if anybody can get
> past the academics, not that we don't need them, we do, we absolutely do need them,
> but get past the struggles with those things, the greater gem is the relationships built.
> And I think any institution of higher that doesn't first focus on the relationships being
> built will lose everything. Because you are going to have students who are not
> connected. They are going to come and get what they need to get and then they're
> going to leave. They're going to be 'thank god" the whole thing is over with. They
> won't remember the school for the fond memories because there won't be anything
> thing fond about them. Especially for the nontraditional students, because not
> everybody can quit life like I can and to be able to have the support system to be able
> to navigate.
>
> So, what does that mean? They are still doing what they are doing and they're
> doing this thing on a part-time basis. And usually, it is part-time and nine times out of

ten it is part-time at night. So that means they leave a job they've been in all day. Probably frustrated the hell out of them and then they have to come to school. And hopefully, they have a great professor that can get them pumping and things like that. But the truth is that is not going to happen all the time, right. And then they have no connections after that because they leave and go home and then they do homework and then their regular life all over again. And the gems I was able to gather, I was able to gather because I was here during the day when everything is popping. When I can connect with this person or that person. Or if somebody comes to me confused, I can walk them right across campus to the right person. They are not getting that after 5 o'clock or 5:30. They're not getting it."

Strayhorn (2008, 2011, 2016, 2019) and Tinto (1975, 1988, 1997, 1998, 2012a, 2012b) have dedicated much of their academic careers speaking of student attrition and persistence. Both Strayhorn and Tinto suggest that students' continuation in and through the college experience, beyond the ability to academically succeed, is based on relationships. These relationships are multilevel (student to student, student to faculty, student to staff, student to the institution), multifaceted, and should be intentional. Lynn's experience of joining and being a part of the institution, a place where she encouraged others to be but was reluctant to enter herself, was a core aspect of her college experience.

Participant 6: Marie

Marie was a Latinx mother of two adult sons who she put through school and college all on her own. Marie was a great student in high school and got a full scholarship to a large public institution of the state where she lived. In Marie's family, education especially of the daughters was not a priority. She was not supported in her aspiration to go to college. She desired to get out of her childhood home so she married at 18 with the hope she would be able to go to school. That was not the case, her new husband wanted her home.

After her divorce, Marie attempted to work two jobs and go back to college. At the beginning of that college journey, Marie lost her mother to a sudden illness. Her desire to continue her education quickly followed, this tragic event in her life. In the end, Marie left

college and continued to work two jobs. Marie was unique in my research because she was first an employee of the college and then made the decision to become a student at that college.

First line of flight: How things connect (Fluid; shapeshifting; continually on the move)

Marie was a storyteller; she provided a lot of rich connecting information about how things came into being as part of her experiences. As she told me about her life, before she became a student, she took me on a journey. I noted in my post-reflexion that when she answered the first question she spoke about identity, culture, being stuck, moving forward, and self-worth. The story itself was fluid and shape-shifting and she spoke directly to the first line of flight and the connection of her experience and the experience she wanted for her children. When she told of her marriage and when she became a mom, Marie stated:

> So, I had to forfeit my scholarship. And it pained me for so many years, it was just something that tugged at my heart. I could have been someone, I could have done something with my life. And, although I don't regret my children, I regret some of the decisions that I made in my life. So, now I am here, and I am married. Two years later, I had my first son, and it was all about wanting to give my children what I didn't have. Number one was support, number two was to have an outlet, number three was being able to talk with my children openly. One of the things that I just felt very strongly about was education. So pretty much I just kind of instill that into my kids' heads. I didn't give my children an option about going to college as far as I was concerned, they were going to attend college.
>
> I know some people saw that as a negative, but as a mother and someone who lost out on an opportunity with a scholarship, I just wanted my kids to do better than me. So, you know, when it's time to start thinking about college and stuff like that, it wasn't about if you are going to go, it was about where you want to, because as far as I knew it was going to happen. If I have to be in debt for the rest of my life. Then, I'll just be in debt.

An additional first line of flight was seen in the way Marie spoke about how hard work and support led to success. Marie spoke about being a successful student and shared the process of how she gained that success with the support of her personal village. Marie stated:

"I think that one of the biggest things that students don't take advantage of is the resources that the schools have for them. I believe part of it too could be that if you don't know what you need, you don't know what you're missing. A lot of the time, I think the only reason why I was able to be successful was because I worked for [MACC]. And I knew that I could pick people's brains and ask them questions. I became friends with a lot of people at the college that were willing to guide me and help me, even help me study. Like how many people, do you know that would be willing to help you along your journey? Again, it takes a village. I believe I was able to be successful because of the people that I had behind me"

Second line of flight: What is continually being constructed (Cultured; gendered; socially classed)

Many of the core aspects of Marie's life were easily brought forward in the second line of flight. Most notable were the ideas of cultural identity that were weaved throughout Marie's story. This idea of culture within the Latinx community was prevalent throughout the current research it can be seen in Latina/Chicana feminist theory (Monzó, 2014; Moya, 2001; Moraga and Anzaldúa,1983; Zavella, 1989), the politics of gender (Bernal, 1998; Brown, 2014; Montoya et al., 2000), Latina's experience in college (Frederick et al., 2020; Guerra et al. 2019; Storlie et al., 2016). It is important to say that cultural identity played a crucial role in the storying of the participants, specifically in that of the Latinx women. Two notable examples of cultural identity manifested during Marie's interview.

"However, in my culture, my mom's generation didn't believe Latina women should go out and get an education. My mom pretty much just told me that was not happening. You're not going anywhere. The only way that I could have left my house was if I was getting married. So, I didn't have any family support per se to encourage me to go to college, even though I'm the youngest of all my siblings; I have six brothers, one sister and I'm at the end. They didn't get involved. I was the only one left in the house. Anyway, my mom was a very strict, Puerto Rican woman."

"I got married at the age of 18 and very naïve, to say the least. In my head, I kind of saw it as my way out. Not realizing that I would be going from, out of the frying pan into the fire. I thought to myself this was great; this is my way out and I can attend college. I don't know why I didn't bother to think things through at that time. I'm married, is he going to let me go away to college? FYI in case you don't know, Puerto Rican men are very possessive. I was not a worldly person, I was very

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naive and homebound all of my life, so the things that are common sense to people were not to me. I went ahead and married him and his response regarding college was: You are out of your damn mind if you think you're going away to college. My dreams died right there and then. I had to forfeit my scholarship."

The loss of Marie's mom brought up aspects of value and self-worth. I noted in my post-reflexion that part of the reason Marie returned to college the first time was to prove her worth. She spoke to that specifically when she talked about the passing of her mother.

> "Many years later after I divorce my husband, being a single parent with 2 boys I decided to go to college. I started at a local college in an accelerated program. While attending school for some time, my mother became ill and in a matter of one week she passed away. After the loss of my mother, I kind of lost my desire for school. I believe I started school just to "prove" that I was good enough to go and get a degree; thinking back to that time I believe I was just trying to prove to my mother and others around me that I could become something and not just another statistic and that I was worthy. When my mother passed away, I just forgot about school and just said whatever, and went on with my life working, two jobs, and taking care of my kids"

Social capital is defined through the power a person gains or loses throughout their lived experiences. Social capital is representative of experiences and is reproduced through those experiences (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1987). Social capital is then played out through interactions with spaces, places, and people. While one experience may have reflected a devaluing of worth, Marie's journal entry that concerned college success showed how value and social capital are gained. Marie noted:

> "College success means a great deal to me for many reasons. The first reason is that I was successful in accomplishing the biggest to-do task that I had for many, many years. College success means that I didn't give up despite the many obstacles I faced. It also means that I proved to my kids that when things get hard you just don't give up. You learn to rest but never quit. Being successful in a large minority family, and being the first to graduate college, even when you had no support means trendsetter! But the most important meaning for me for being successful is that NO ONE can ever take my education away from me. That is the truest College Success!"

Third line of flight: Decision to join or not join (stances; intensities; movement)

Marie was a unique participant, her role as a college employee assisted in her move toward success. This also meant she had an additional commitment to college success and being a part of the college community. When asked about one thing she would say to the people who work at her college, Marie compared getting to know people with opening a book and stated:

> "That's an interesting question. The one thing that I would like to say, regarding the people at community college, is to learn to treat your people well and with respect. I think you would get a lot more from them. My mantra is, take the time to open the book and read it because you don't know all there is to one person. You may just be surprised and find some amazing people at your fingertips. But because we don't take the time to open the book, we are quick to judge. And we shun them off because we just think they're stupid, that they are not capable. You'd be surprised by the amount of talent the college has."

Marie's position as an employee of MACC who moved from being an employee to being an employee who was also a student and then being an employee who also graduated from the college gave her a unique perspective of what it meant to be in the system and a part of the system. Her story exemplified Strayhorn's (2016) view of belongs and the institution's responsibility to ensure that while they move the masses toward graduation, there must be a concerted effort to identify and address the specific needs of the individual.

Three African American and three Latinx women allowed me access to their stories for the current research. The information provided here is only a portion of the full stories they told. These women spoke of being mothers, daughters, sisters, and students. I cannot speak to the connection these women might have had with one another personally, but their stories resonated with the ideas of being women, being womanish, being a womanist and a Latina feminist and it spoke to want to "know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one" (Walker, 1983 p. x). Not for the simple act of knowing, but for the act of

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sharing what is known. Below I summarize the salient aspects of the lines of flight noticed during the post-reflexion process.

Intersections of Experiences

Post-intentional phenomenology was a useful tool to examine the lived experiences and essential structure in the meaning for African American and Latinx women who returned to college. The process allowed me to think in multiple ways about data and allow the connections to reveal themselves. As I explored the intersections of the participants' experiences, I began to notice places within the research where saliency occurred, not just among the participants, but in and through the research. When I used terms saliency and salient, I referred to the degree to which lines of flight resonated among participants and were visible in the literature (Lavrakas, 2008). The more lines of flight resonated with participants, the more salient I considered it to be. Conversely, the fewer lines of flight resonated among the participants the less salient they were for the current research. This did not mean that the less salient lines of flight were not important, only that the lines did not flow across the participants' stories.

Three salient lines of flight, that focused on how things connect were identified. As was demonstrated in Table 5, three connections occurred most often across all identities (a) college attainment and a better future; (b) college success and determination; and (c) college degree and being a good mother. While these three lines of flight were revealed most often, data also revealed that two African American women equated education to a level of creditability, two Latinx women noted a connection between being a woman and cultural

expectations, and one Latinx identified a connection between intelligence and the ability to learn.

Table 5:

Salient First Lines of Flight: How things connect, fluid, shape-shifting, continually on the move

	Amber	Sheila	Lynn	Sonya	Frida	Marie
College Attainment | Better Future	Yes			Yes	Yes	
College Success | Determination	Yes	Yes				Yes
College Degree | Good Mother			Yes	Yes		Yes
Intelligence | Ability to Learn				Yes		
Education | Creditability		Yes	Yes			
Woman | Cultural Expectation					Yes	Yes

Two Latinx women (Sonya and Frida) and one African American woman (Amber) noted a connection between college attainment and a better future and demonstrated that through their storying. This idea was also prevalent in the experiences of Latinx students who spoke about degree attainment as a way of supporting themselves and their families (Frederick et al., 2020; Guerra et al., 2019; Storlie et al., 2016). This was not a specific topic discussed in the literature on African American female students. The question not answered here is whether aspects of Amber's immigrant identity were at play in the connection of education to a better future. Two African American women (Amber and Sheila) and one Latinx woman (Marie) equated college success with determination. This idea of determination was noted for research about college for both African American and Latinx women (Du et al., 2016; Farmer et al., 2016; Frederick et al., 2020; Guerra et al., 2019; Neal-Jackson, 2018; Storlie et al., 2016). Two Latinx women (Sonya and Marie) and one African American woman (Lynn) equated being a good mother with degree attainment. This idea of being a good mother and college was evident in the stories of the participants but was not reflected in the research. Being a mother and mother were noted in various areas within the research but were not tied directly to degree attainment.

In Chapter 2, I took a deep dive into several development and identity theories that I assumed would reveal themselves through the research process. The five lines of flight noted in Table 6 were included in the research that occurred for Chapter 2. The saliency of social capital, discussed in both Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 lends support to students' sense of belonging, attrition characteristics, and identity development (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1988; Eng, 2009; Rogošic & Baranovic, 2016; Sandoval-Lucero, 2014; Sullivan, 2001). Student development, which focuses on attrition, was the second most salient across the participants. For the participants in the study, student development that focused on belonging was important to two Latinx women and one African American woman. It was important to note, that for one Latinx woman neither form of student development was found to be salient in her narrative, journals, my observations, or identified in my post-reflexion notes. The aspects of student development related to their sense of belonging and attrition were also evident in the research (Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Okinaka, 1990; Schlossberg et al., 1989; Strayhorn, 2016; Tinto, 1993). Additionally, I found, that for the participants in this study, Latina/Chicana identities were salient for all three Latinx women and two of the three African American women expressed the saliency of womanist. The ways the participants defined community and their place in the community was reflected in womanist theory and Latina/Chicana feminist theory (Branch, 2020; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; hooks, 1995; Monzó, 2014; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983; Moya, 2001; Walker, 1983; Zavella, 1989)

Table 6:

Salient Second Lines of Flight: What is continually being constructed, cultured gendered, socially classed

	Amber	Sheila	Lynn	Sonya	Frida	Marie
Student Development – Belonging	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes
Student Development – Attrition	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Social Capital	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Womanist	Yes	Yes		Yes		
Latina/Chicana Feminist				Yes	Yes	Yes

The decision to join was found to be salient more often than the decision to not join. I coded Table 7 as to join or not join but only noted it in the table when the topic was expressed as part of my post-reflexion. For example, Frida she made a conscious decision to not actively join the family or college. This was a conscious decision by Frida when she indicated that she no longer had time to engage family, nor did she see a benefit of being a part of the college community. She was there for a degree and family could wait until the degree was attained. The only two areas where all participants made the decision to join or not join were family and college. Decisions to join or not join through volunteer/community involvement were more evident among African American women. Latinx women's decision to join with co-workers was more evident than it was for African American women. Branch (2020) found "Joining professional organizations, affinity groups, campus committees, and volunteering within the community can also help to build support strategies for navigating the [Higher Education] environment" Only one participant spoke directly to the idea of being among the ranks of educated women and this was not found in research about college student success.

Table 7

Salient Third Lines of Flight: Decision to join or not join, stances, intensities, movement

	Amber	Sheila	Lynn	Sonya	Frida	Marie
Family	Join	Join	Join	Join	Not Join	Join
College	Not join	Join	Join	Join	Not Join	Join
Co-workers	Join			Join		Join
Volunteer/Community	Not Join	Join	Join			Join
Sisterhood of Educated		Join				

Answering the Research Questions

I had the unique opportunity to spend time with the amazing participants who contributed to my study. I listened to the stories they told, read the journals they created, and reflected on the fullness of the experiences they shared. I used a post-reflexion plan to

analyze their experiences alongside my observation. Several conclusions revealed themselves through the process. The African American and Latinx women, who participated in my study (a) were mindful of how one decision led to multiple outcomes; (b) recognized themselves in and across a spectrum of identities; and (c) made conscious choices about when to enter and when to leave an environment.

The research process required that I identified a problem, posed well-developed research questions, researched theories, reviewed current literature, and developed an appropriate research methodology. While this process provided the foundation for me to conduct this research, it was the narratives, journals, and observations used to create the post-reflexions that allowed me to answer the two central research and four corresponding research questions. My intention here was to honor the participants and their voices and ensure a portion of their stories were added to the conversation and literature around the college attainment and success of African American and Latinx women.

The first central question, and all the questions that followed, were answered after I first accepted that any analysis based on identity, especially when that identity is gendered, sexed, or raced, does adequately speak to the experience of Black and Brown women without an understanding they, these women, were more than the sums of their identities. I used intersectionality as a tool to interrogate the dynamics of transition and as a political lens for the examination of the experiences of women (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989). To answer these questions, I consistently worked to acknowledge the complexity of the experiences of these African American and Latinx women.

Central question 1: *What is the lived experience of transitioning from employment to college for African American and Latinx women who are low-SES and first-generation students?*

As was seen in the descriptions of the participants and the telling of their stories, both commonalities and differences existed. All the participants experienced working before they decided to attend college. All the participants came from low-SES backgrounds. While all the participants were not the first in their families to attend college, all were first-generation college students. Most of these women saw themselves differently than they saw their classmates. Most of the participants continued to work while they attended college. The fact that most participants maintained a job while they pursued an education meant, that for these participants, one identity "worker" did not end when a second identity "student" was added.

The participants in the study often made difficult choices about how they spent their limited time. The two participants with younger children still completed the role of being mothers. Those in relationships made decisions about how much time to give their partners and the relationship. Those who gave to the community or other family members made decisions about how much was left to give, and at times that meant to not give at all.

For the participants in this study, these African American and Latinx women, their lived experiences were complex. The fact that they became students. Becoming did not change many of the roles and tasks there they needed to complete. It was then important to ask about the motivation to return to college.

Sub-Question 1: What motivates them to become college students after years of employment?

As was noted in Table 5, social capital theory was present in the ways all the participants experienced the world. The connections identified in Table 5 provided context to how the participants argued that if one thing occurred another thing would happen. I intentionally did not use the terms pseudologic or false logic here because the way participants equated one action to an outcome is a personal decision based on how they saw and engaged the world. Through the telling of their stories three participants, across both African American and Latinx identity believed (a) college attainment will result in a better future; (b) college success occurs with determination; and (c) having a college degree makes someone a good mother.

Sub-Question 2: *How do they articulate their experiences related to transitioning to college?*

How the participants articulate their experience of transition to college was as unique as the participants themselves. First, their identities gave an account of their experiences, that is to say, their racial identity, the gender they wore, the roles they held. When Marie and Sonya spoke about the process of how they became students, they did so from a Latinx-mother perspective. As Latinx women, they saw value in the "village" that it took to get obtaining a degree. As mothers, they looked out for those around them and asked that others took a moment to listen, to open someone else's "book" with the goal of understanding who students were. When Amber and Sheila spoke about the process of becoming a student they did so from an African American community-mother perspective. As African American women, they spoke about the pride of deciding to change themselves and the communities where they lived. As mothers, they cared for those in their homes and those in their community. Lynn and Frida, too, spoke of becoming students from perspectives that are influenced by their identities. For Frida, this did not mean that she joined the college

community but rather that as a Latinx woman she understood the impact that the completion of a degree would have on her future.

Central question 2: *What is the essential structure in the meaning of attending college for African American and Latinx women who are low-SES and first-generation students?*

It remained my belief, that identity existed and was constructed simultaneously. For the participants in the study, they entered college with well-developed identities that were influenced by their culture, their upbringing, their life situation, when I completed this study, and much more. However, essential across all identities was the idea that if they attended college, and received an education, it was the catalysis, the one thing that once added, changed how they engaged the world. The post-reflexions developed and used to identify the first line of flight were the core idea that education would lead to something better. Marie said it best in her journal when she stated:

> "The most important meaning for me, for being successful, is that NO ONE can ever take my education away from me."

Sub-Question 1: *What are some of the experiences they identify as being significant during the first semester of college?*

The participants all experienced the first semester of college a bit differently, but significant across some of the stories were the connections they made to the college or someone at the college. Lynn spoke of meeting a professor, who wanted to ensure she had a great experience and was a successful student. This professor went on to become a mentor to her. When Sonya read her textbook for sociology, she saw herself and how society was constructed in a way that put her at a disadvantage. Amber recalled a need to breastfeed her baby and an exchange with a counselor that made her question whether or not the college was going to be a good place for her. Frida was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Sheila

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noticed that just the act of attending college changed the way her colleagues approached her. Marie recalled an experience, at a different college where she took her first college courses and how she was made to feel that she should not ask questions, that others thought she should know.

Sub-question 2: *What does college success mean to them after their first semester of enrollment?*

The participants were at different stages in their education and when they spoke about the meaning of college success, it was from the place where they were at that time. Marie had graduated and Lynn and Frida were close to the completion of their degrees. Amber, Sheila, and Amanda were closer to the beginning of the college journey and when they spoke about college success it meant the completion of the process, being awarded a degree, getting to a place where their ideas were valued. When I looked at the participants as a whole, however, college success overwhelming meant a start to a better future.

Conclusion

The findings provided in the chapter illustrated the unique experiences of African American and Latinx women as they experienced becoming and being students at a large community college in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. This chapter has presented profiles for each participant, offered a discussion of the three lines of flight for each participant, and highlighted salient aspects across the lines of flight.

Overall, the experiences of the participants highlighted their desire to obtain a degree and to increase their social capital. Their experiences were informed by their racial identity, their gender, the many aspects of their lived experiences, and the roles they served. The following chapter, Chapter 6 presents a discussion of findings, implications,

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recommendations of the current research, and future research. I will end the chapter with a

personal reflection.

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The current research study was undertaken to gain a better understanding of how African American and Latinx women experienced the transition from employment to college. The study focused on six nontraditional-aged African American and Latinx women, whose college experience began after at least seven years of employment. All the participants in the study attended a large urban serving community college, in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The voices of African and Latinx women, who attend college lack full present in the academic literature about college success. In this study, I used a praxis that engaged social understanding and intersectionality to ignite the wholeness of the group and honor the uniqueness of the individual (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989). It was important that the voices of these diverse women, whose experiences did not always reflect the experiences of men who identify across similar racial, SES, and cultural experiences, were the primary data sources, for this study.

The study was designed in keeping with a post-intentional framework that allowed meaning to emerge through the lived experiences of the participants (Vagle, 2018; Valentine et al., 2018). I incorporated participants' narratives, journal entries, and my observation to create post-reflexions to see where meaning leaked, flowed, and disappeared and allowed lines of flight to be explored. First, I developed a profile for each participant through an analysis of data sources. Second, I completed an analysis of the intersections of salient aspects of each line of flight. The voices of participants helped to reveal (a) how the participants brought connections into existences; (b) what was being constructed through African American and Latinx women experiences; and (c) when and where African

American and Latinx women made decisions to join or not join - either at the college or in their personal lives.

It was through the telling of their stories that I began to understand that it is not only the whole of the identities of these women but the many aspects of their identities that helped their stories come into focus. The findings have implications for how institutions support nontraditional-aged African American and Latinx women as they enter post-secondary education. Additionally, the findings provided a first step in understanding how these nontraditional-aged students experience college.

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Implications of Finding and Recommendations

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The number of female students aged 25 to 34 grew by 41% over a 14-year period. That same population of female students is projected to grow an additional 17% over a 10-year. Female student aged 35 and older grew 25% over the same 14-year period and is expected to grow an additional 10% over the same 10-year period (Hussar & Bailey, 2016). Will colleges and universities be prepared to serve these students as they enter the halls of higher education? If the current graduation rates of African American and Latinx women are reflective of how these students are served, then I fear that institutions are woefully under-prepared.

The graduate rates for women outpace the graduate rates for men. However, the Digest of Education Statistics (2020) noted that while the graduation rates for White women sit at nearly 67%, the graduation rates of their African American and Latinx female classmates are 43.9% and 58.2% respectively. There is a clear incongruence in how African American and Latinx women experience college. More pointedly, a great deal of time, money, and effort has been spent in the support of Black and Brown men, with the hope that

the services that have been created can be applied to the needs of all students, including Black and Brown women. I am not suggesting that we do less for men of color. I am suggesting that the needs of Black and Brown girls, who sit in the same classrooms with Black and Brown boys deserve equitable support in attaining a post-secondary degree. We are reminded by Chun et al. (2013) of the politics of identity and by Butler (2015) that throughout history spaces are allocated by gender, meaning the spaces where students need to thrive have been allocated by the politics of gender. We cannot separate the woven intentional and unintentional identities from the African American and Latinx women who experience them.

The women who participated in this study were salient in how they constructed their womanist and Latina/Chicana identities but there was a fear that colleges and universities did not see them nor were the needs understood. Ambers stated:

> "And I can see why a lot of my Latinx and Brown and Black people, women, just quit college. 'Cause, it's a lot to juggle…"

The ideas of womanism (hooks, 1995; Lorde, 1996; Walker, 1983) and Latina/Chicana feminism (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983) changed the way identities were viewed. They created spaces where non-White women found and grew a community. These leaders gave voice to a way of thinking that did not ask to take the space of others but to be seen whole in all spaces. I wonder, are new forms of womanism/womanist or Latina/Chicana feminism required, or do the forms that have been tried and tested over time need to be dusted off, polished up, and reintroduced into the curriculum of those who support student success. Perhaps we are at a crossroads and need to intentionally view student development with a gendered lens.

When viewing the student development theories presented by Strayhorn (2016) and Tinto (1993), it is possible to suggest that for African American and Latinx women there is a

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need to deconstruct Tinto's assertions of attrition in a way that reimagines Strayhorn's sense of belonging. Creating systems that better connect students to institutions of higher education, either through student to student, student to staff, student to faculty, and student to administrator connections can change a student's trajectory toward success. As policymakers and higher education professionals, we continue to be concerned that first-generation students are often less prepared for college success and lack information that connects them to resources (Barry et al., 2009). When student transition is engaged from the perspective of adult learners, we can change the way we serve student and their sense of belonging (Evan et al., 2010). It is then the role of college administrators and faculty to diligent work to support students to achieve their academic goals. Policies that reduce dropout and stop-out rates can increase the overall success of the student body. Following are recommendations based on the findings.

- Begin to understand why African American and Latinx women graduate at significantly lower rates than the White female classmates (Digest of Education Statistics, 2020; Farmer et al., 2016).

- Develop spaces and places that meet the unique needs of nontraditional-aged African American and Latinx women who often support children while they attend college (Alfred & Nanton, 2009; Lin, 2016; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Próspero, 2007).

- Develop mentor and support systems that specifically view the needs of African American and Latinx women (Branch, 2020; Johnson, 2016; Ramos & Yi, 2020; Stanton-Salazar and Spina, 2005; Strayhorn, 2007).

- Expand gender and racial identity curriculum to include womanist and Latina/Chicana feminist research (Branch, 2020; Frederick et al., 2020; Smith, 2017).

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- Expand the number of tenure-track faculty, upper-level staff, and administrators who African American and Latinx women so female students can see themselves in those who have a greater attachment to the institution and assist in creating a greater sense of belonging with those students (Grant & Ghee, 2015; Strayhorn, 2016).

- Anti-racist training is not enough; it does not fully address the spaces and places that African American and Latinx women experience or how they experience those spaces (Brown, 2014; Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989)

The current research should only be considered the beginning of a long-overdue conversation. The greater inclusion of African American and Latinx women in the discourse about spaces designated for student success is needed. Voices that choose to be silent are exceedingly different than the silencing of those voices through exclusion. Future research can help ensure better representation of all voices when making decisions about the future of an institution.

Future Research

Over the past several years, much of the research about college persistence and success focused on the needs of Black and Brown male students. Many of the programs and resources, while designed for men, were developed in the hope that would student persistence and success would be spread globally. While there are benefits to global desire, there are times when the needs of a population require our attention. The current research speaks about the experiences of six women at one urban community college in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The number of nontraditional-aged women continues to rise. We must better understand this growing population of students if we are to support their success. Future research could take a broader look at the population of students presented in

this study to determine how they might be served better by colleges and universities. This study helped me add African American and Latinx women's voices to the body of research; future studies can help to expand our understanding of African American and Latinx women by:

- Expanding the literature on African American and Latinx women's experience navigating their second year of college. This literature could include research on the second-year college experience, understanding the persistence rates between the second and third year of college.

- Investigating the impact of out-of-classroom engagement on African American and Latinx women's college retention and graduation. This impact of non-classroom engagement could include information about Black Greek organizations, Latina Greek organizations, academic club involvement, and identity-based club involvement.

- Exploring the disparity in graduation rates of African American and Latinx women compared to their White female classmates. This exploration of graduation rates could include discussions of why African American and Latinx women stop out or drop out of college, at higher rates than White women; what are predictors of stopping out or dropping of college; and, at what point in their academic career do African American and Latinx women most often exit the institutions.

- Researching the college success habits of African American and Latinx mothers. This researching on college success should include an understanding of what it means to be a mother, what it means to be an African American/Latinx mother, the impact of community on success, and understanding the academic goal of the mother.

- Expanding the research on the academic pipelines to include African American and Latinx female students. This might include a review of pipeline research on K12 to college, understanding when girls most often decide to attend college and why, and what K12 to college mentor programs exist.

Stated several times throughout this study are the political aspects of gender and their impact on spaces and places. A heuristic view of various curriculum, college/university services, or physical spaces on campuses could help to identify ways to improve access and success. Perhaps there is a need to asks follow-up questions, including (a) how the experiences of women are represented in the curriculum; (b) how women are represented through university services; and (c) how have the needs of women incorporated into spaces and design.

At the community college level, college success does not always equate to degree attainment. Often students enter community colleges as an access point to other educational ambitions. An interesting study might include how the level of out-of-classroom engagement impacts nontraditional-aged African American and Latinx women's sense of belonging. Additionally, it is important to understand why students stay and persist.

Conclusion

When I selected the topic for this dissertation, I did so with the knowledge that the material was important and that if presented correctly, the work I created could have an impact on the African American and Latinx women we should be prepared to serve in higher education. I must admit, when I started this process, I did not realize the level of impact that studying and committing to womanist or Latina/Chicana feminist thought would have on me. There were times I had to force myself to disengage from the materials. I think there are

many people out there, similar to me, who never knew there was something more, something richer and it could be found in feminist theory. The work provided here is but a quick glance at the enormity of the work that can and should be done around the success of women. As educators, gendering our curricula should become a priority. As a practitioner, it becomes ever more important that the work we do move us beyond equal to the ideas and practices of equitable.

Personal Reflections

While sitting in a meeting to discuss the persistence of men of color, I was handed a report that included retention rates of all students across a variety of identities, at the institution. Yes, the overall report showed that a larger percentage of men were not graduating than the percentage of women. However, I noticed that for every man that did not complete his degree more than two women did not complete it – this is an ongoing challenge with college success data. Out of respect for the purpose of the meeting, I waited until after to inquire of the VP for strategic enrollment management why we were not discussing the numbers of women who were leaving the institution. To which I was told, there are simply more women than men, so they are good.

When I completed this research, was the father of a college-aged daughter. As a practitioner in higher education, I wanted the experience and the opportunity that my daughter had to be at least as good as the opportunities of the men in the same room. Granted, my daughter was advantaged by not being a first-generation student and having a parent who worked in higher education. Still, I wondered about the Black and Brown girls that sat next to her, that may not have had someone to ask about resources, or to proofread a

paper – interestingly this was something I had been doing a lot for her. My daughter, however, entered in the middle of my story.

I grew in a loving home with two parents who wanted one thing, their children to graduate high school. My mom was an amazing reader. My dad could do these complicated math equations in his head. Neither of my parents graduated high school. My wonderfully brilliant father never learned to read; where he grew up in the south no one understood dyslexia. My mom had already read all the textbooks for her senior and was bored. Being the oldest, I was the first to graduate high school. My grades were good. I graduated with way more credits than I needed. I was accepted to an amazing college, but there was a challenge. We were never shown a way to pay for college. I promised my parents that I would figure it out and go back sometime in the future. At the age of 30, after the birth of my daughter, I started my educational journey.

I started college at a large university in Kentucky. Just over a year into school, my family moved to Kansas City for work. When we negotiated our move, it was decided that I would work part-time and go to school full-time. I was lucky enough to get an administrative position in the History Department at UMKC and transferred to UMKC. I was a part-time employee and a full-time student. I had the opportunity to discover the many advantages that the university experience provided. In the last semester of my undergraduate, I had the opportunity to apply to be a full-time employee in the Office of Student Life as the coordinator for LGBTQ Center. When I was offered the position, the director asked that I started the higher education program as soon as I could get admitted. She said she knew I could do the job, but the work required a different vocabulary that I needed to understand. I

immediately applied and was accepted. I was the first in my family to graduate with a college degree. Then I started this new position and an amazing journey unfolded before me.

I spent a few years in my first position, completed my master's degree, and started my doctoral journey. I left the university and accepted a director's position at a community college, where I worked for almost eight years. I followed my time at the community college with a position at a large research institution. Along my journey, life happened and my path toward completion was interrupted.

I made a few attempts to complete the process and was stalled when I visited my parents and discovered that my mother was almost bedridden. No one had told or they seem to know why. When I looked at her, I guessed it was cancer and that she was close to dying. We moved her and my dad into our home and I became her caregivers. My journey was interrupted. I was blessed to have had the opportunity to spend more than six months with my mom by the loss took a toll on me. In my family, my mom was the heart, when she passed my dad was lost and needed my care. I waited for an opportunity to return and complete my doctoral degree. I was getting close to my time and knew that my time for completion was close. I needed a new plan.

I was very lucky to be accepted by one of the toughest chairs for my dissertation. When Dr. Loyce Caruthers agreed to assist me, she said, "you're going to have to do the work. I can be here to support you, but you're going to need to show me you are willing to work." I remembered what she said because I wrote it down. She also made it clear that she was tough but fair and so long as I did the work, she would help me get to the end of this race. In the fall of 2020, during a horrible pandemic, she supported me in having my

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dissertation proposal approved. She worked with me to complete my IRB approval and she set a timeline. As I produced work she worked as hard as I did.

Through my conversations with her, I refined my project. When I struggled to find information about African and American and Latinx women in college, she asked me to explore the K-12 experience of girls. When I mentioned the lack of information about college success strategies of women, she asked me to consider the success of women in other areas. When I talked about intersectionality and its application, she asked me to explore, feminist and womanist ideas. Little did I know how impacted I would be by the writings of Breines (2007), Brown et al., (2013), The Combahee River Collective (1996), hooks (1995), Lorde (1996), Smith (2017), Walker (1983) and so many more of these women. I looked forward to enjoying their works once this process was completed.

Just more than a month before writing this, as I worked to collect my data. My brother, who had lived with me and my family in every city where we had lived, who followed in my footsteps and completed his degrees at UMKC, including the same master's degree in higher education, passed away after his battle with colon cancer was lost. Prior to his transition, as I sat alone with him and he said, "Listen bub, I'm not doing too well. No matter what happens I need you to complete your doctorate" and so that is just what I did.

My life, work, and family did not pause for this process. I still had a leadership role in higher education. My work afforded me the opportunity to see part of the world I possibly would have never seen. More importantly, my work had allowed me to positively impact the lives of thousands of students during this journey. During my career, I developed programs that increased student retention and success. I watched as many students went on to do amazing things and to become leaders. I assisted with the creation of an LGBTQ scholarship.

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I instituted a three-level leadership program that includes social change, the student

leadership challenge, and servant leadership. I co-wrote and received a $150,000 grant for the

development of a Veteran's Resource Center. I assisted in securing a three-year, $250,000

grant for the development of an LGBTQ Center. I charged my team with:

- the development of a leadership transfer program for students transferring from a community college to the university;

- the development of a student leadership retreat;

- the redesign and implementation of civic engagement efforts that have sent student around the world; and

- invested nearly $1 million for the redesign of spaces to be better meet student needs.

I have also had the opportunity to work with teams to develop the mission, vision,

goals, and values. Had a marketing team win an award for the development and

implementation of a new website. Additionally, I worked to develop a scholarship that in its

first six months, in the middle of a pandemic raise over $50,000 for LGBTQ and Allied

students. In many ways, I was still new to higher education, I have worked hard and have

been afforded many opportunities, for which I am thankful. This research has allowed me to

be reflective of who I am as a practitioner and as an educator. I am proud of the work

included in this research.

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

1. What roles did you perform prior to attending college?

    o What type of support did you have in these roles?

2. Tell me about a typical day in your primary role prior to college? (Please start with the morning and continue to the end of your day.)

3. What about your daily routine changed when you became a student?

    o What are you still doing?

    o What has been the most difficult adjustment?

4. How have your relationships changed since becoming a student?

5. Describe how you saw yourself before becoming a student.

6. Describe how you see yourself now.

7. What makes you a successful student?

8. What tools, if any, have you used to help you as a student?

9. What has been the easiest part of becoming a student?

10. What has been the greatest challenge of becoming a student?

11. What advice would you give yourself prior to attending college knowing what you know now?

12. What do you hope being a student will help you achieve?

13. If you could say one thing to the people who work at your college what would that be?

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Cover Letter

[Date]
[Participant Name]
[Address]

My name is David Greene. I am a doctoral student in the University of Missouri-Kansas City Higher Education Administration program under the supervision of Dr. Loyce Caruthers. In order to complete my dissertation, *Transitions from Employment to College: Perspectives of African American and Latinx Women.* I plan to study the transition of women from employment to college. **I have received permission from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional Review Board to contact you regarding the possibility of your participation in my doctoral dissertation research.**

You are receiving this request based on your reply to a request for participants who are returning to college after more than seven years of employment inside or outside the home. The interview should take approximately 45 to 60 minutes and will be conducted at your convenience via a web conference, such as Zoom or FaceTime. No compensation is available to participate in this study. This study involves no known risk to you and will not benefit you directly/indirectly as the participant.

If you are willing to participate in this research study by answering questions about your experiences a student, I will ask for your verbal consent for the enclosed Consent form during our first call. Upon receipt of your willingness to participate, I will contact you to discuss the most convenient means for you to participate in the interview.

I appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

David L. Greene
Doctoral Candidate
University of Missouri-Kansas City
DLGBN4@umsystem.edu
816-695-8946

Informed Consent Form

Study Title:

Transitions from Employment to College: Perspectives of African American and Latinx Women

Authorized Study Personnel

Principal Investigator: Loyce Caruthers   Office: (816) 235-1044
Secondary Investigator: David L. Greene   Cell (816) 695-8946

KEY INFORMATION

You are being asked to take part in this research study because you responded to a request for participants in a study about African and Latinx women returning to college after working in or outside the home. Research studies are voluntary and only include people who choose to take part. The purpose of this research is to describe women's experiences transitioning from employment to college. The total amount of time you would be in this study 75 to 90 minutes, which includes the time to complete three journal entries and one interview. During your participation you will be involved in a virtual interview via zoom or another accessible video conferencing format. Taking part in this research involves the following risks or discomforts: I will be asking questions about your specific experiences of becoming a student and while I do not anticipate any risk, I am aware of stereotypes often placed on African American and Latinx women and work guard against any such bias. Taking part in this study includes the following benefits: Your participation will help to give a greater understanding to the experiences of African and Latinx women and may assist us in better serving female students in the future. You have the alternative of not taking part in this study.

Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. As the researcher(s) discusses this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. Please talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this study is to describe the African American and Latinx women's experiences transitioning from employment to college after working in or outside home.

You are being asked to be in this study because you self-identified at an African American or Latinx woman who started working in or outside the home after completing your secondary education (grades 6-12). After at least seven (7) years of employment you made the decision to start your post-secondary (college) education. Additionally, you are Pell Grant eligible and provide at least half of the income for your family.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
Approximately 6-8 people will take part in this study.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?
You will be asked to complete 3 journal entries using an internet-based questionnaire. Each journal entry is relatively short and should take 5 – 10 minutes of your time. The first journal entry asks about what influenced your decision to attend college after years of employment and will occur prior to the initial interview. The second journal entry asks about a significant experience you had when you first started your college education and will occur immediately after completing your interview. The third and final journal ask about college success and will occur two weeks after the interview. After the first journal entry you will be asked to participate in a virtual interview that will last between 45 and 60 minutes.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?
The total time commitment for this study is 70 – 95 minutes over a three-week period. This includes about 10 minutes approximately one week before the interview, 45 – 60 minutes for the virtual interview and 10 minutes immediately following the interview and 10 minutes two week following the interview.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?
There are no physical risks associated with this study. There is, however, the potential risk of loss of confidentiality. Every effort will be made to keep your information confidential; however, this cannot be guaranteed.

Some of the questions we will ask you as part of this study may make you feel uncomfortable. You may refuse to answer any of the questions, and you may take a break at any time during the study. You may stop your participation in this study at any time.

ARE THERE BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?
The information provided from this study may benefit higher education and bring a clearer understanding of how to better assist women who decide to attend college after spending time working in or outside the home.

WILL MY INFORMATION BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?
The University of Missouri System, Authorization No. 00-018 requires research data to be retained for 7 years after the final report. Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and for seven years after the study is complete.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS TO YOU?
There is no cost to you to be in this research study.
WHAT ABOUT COMPENSATION?
There is not compensation for your participation in this study.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM DURING THIS RESEARCH STUDY?
Your well-being is a concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

UMKC appreciates people who help it gain knowledge by being in research studies. It is not UMKC policy to compensate human subjects in the event this research results in injury/harm. The University, in fulfilling its public responsibility, has provided medical, professional, and general liability insurance or self-funded coverage for any injury/harm in the event such injury/harm is caused by the negligence of the University, its faculty and staff. In the event you have suffered an injury/harm as the result of participation in this research study, you are to advise the researcher listed on page one and contact the University Risk Management Office, telephone (573) 882-1181 who can review the matter and provide further information.

WHAT ABOUT MY RIGHTS TO DECLINE PARTICIPATION OR WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?
You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw') at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the researcher(s) or with the University of Missouri Kansas City (list others as applicable).

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

WHOM DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the researcher(s) listed at the beginning of this form.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, or to discuss problems, concerns or suggestions related to your participation in the research, or to obtain information about research participant's rights, contact the UMKC Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office
Phone: (816) 235-5927
Email: umkcirb@umkc.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT
The purpose of this study, procedures to be followed, risks and benefits have been explained to me. I have been allowed to ask questions, and my questions have been answered to my

satisfaction. I have been told whom to contact if I have questions, to discuss problems, concerns, or suggestions related to the research, or to obtain information. I have read or had read to me this consent form and agree to be in this study, with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time. I have been told that I will be given a signed copy of this consent form.

Do you verbally give your consent to participant in this research?

_____
Printed Name of Subject

_____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Verbal Consent

_____   _____ _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Verbal Consent   Date   Time

APPENDIX D

Observation Protocol

Date: Time: Length of observation: Location: Participant:	

Epoché: Take a moment to suspend beliefs, biases, and preconceptions Be willing to accommodate any meaning Reflective-Meditation – Where am I at this specific moment	

Descriptive Notes	*Reflective Notes*
Physical setting: Visual layout	Question to self, observations of nonverbal communications and my interpretations
Description of the participant Participants comments: Expressed in quotes	

APPENDIX E

Email Invitation to participate.

Dear Student,

My name is David Greene. I am a nontraditional, first-generation college graduate, and a current doctoral student at the University of Missouri – Kansas City (UMKC). I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled, *Transition from employment to college: Perspectives of African American and Latinx women*. The purpose of this study will be to better understand how women, specifically African American and Latinx women, experience being a college student after working in or outside the home. The study involves completing three journal entries. The length of each entry is up to the you. The study also involves one virtual interview to talk about your experience while attending college.

Your identity will be kept confidential. This research is not being sponsored by your respective college however, the college has approved this study and outreach to its African and Latinx students. I will not receive any financial gain from your participation. However, your support will allow me to complete an important part of my doctoral program.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please confirm your willingness by clicking here. I will ask for your verbal consent during our first virtual meeting. Upon receiving your confirmation to participate, I will contact you to discuss the most convenient way for you to participate in the virtual interview.

If you would like more information about the study, please contact me by phone 816-695-8946 or by email dlgbn4@umsystem.edu. Thank you for considering this request. I certainly look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

David Greene
BA, M.A., Doctoral Student, University of Missouri-Kansas City

APPENDIX F

Qualtrics Interest Form

Thank you for your interest in participating in my dissertation research titled *Transition from employment to college: Perspectives of African American and Latinx women*. The information you provide here will confirm your eligibility to participate and provide a way for me to contact you.

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw') at any time before, during, or after the research begins, for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the me as the researcher, with the University of Missouri Kansas City, or with [Your College].

I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Do you identify as female?
Yes
No

Are you age 25 or older?
Yes
No

Have you completed at least one semester of college?
Yes
No

Do or did you care for someone other than yourself before attending college?
Yes
No

Please select the identity that best describes you. You can select more than one answer.
American Indian, First Nation, Native American, or Alaska Native
Hispanic, Latina, Latinx
Asian
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
African American or Black
White

Please enter your email address. This will be the primary way I contact you.

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VITA

David Lesley Greene was born February 19, 1970, in Detroit Michigan. He was raised and taught to be an honest and caring person by William and Carolyn Rose, his uncle and aunt who became his adoptive parents. His education started in Prestonsburg, Kentucky, where he completed the first nine and half years of his education. He completed his secondary education in 1988 at Whitko High School in South Whitley, Indiana. He spent more than 12 years employed at three Fortune 500 companies and two restaurants before he returned to his education. He began his post-secondary education at the University of Louisville in 2000, where he completed four semesters before he transferred to the University of Missouri at Kansas City (UMKC). He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2006. After he completed his undergraduate education, Mr. Greene assumed a position in the Office of Student Life as the coordinator of LGBT Center where he worked for three years. During his tenure at UMKC, he earned a Master of Arts degree. He accepted a position at the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP) where he worked for more than seven-year, where he served as the Director of Student Life. Mr. Greene's time at CCP was followed by his employment at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), where he has served for almost four years.

In his role at Virginia Commonwealth University, Mr. Greene provides leadership and financial oversight for eight functional areas and has staffing oversight, for 37 full-time employees and up to ten graduate assistants, and 150 student employees. Since he arrived at VCU, he has worked closely with his team to rebrand the department through the development of a clear mission that is backed by a forward-thinking vision and an inclusive set of values that are assessed by measurable goals. Additionally, he and his team developed

new programs and initiatives, reallocated spaces, and realigned programs to better meet the needs of a changing student population. To better serve students, he created policies and procedures meant to support student organizations and guide the relationship with fraternities and sororities.

While at CCP, Mr. Greene reviewed and developed new programs and operating principles which impacted the more than 31,000 students taking credit and non-credit classes at the college. He took a critical look at staff development, and the impact of full-time enrollment on the operating budgets, and how the departmental mission supported the Division of Academic and Student Affairs and College's long-term goals and strategies for persistence and graduation. Mr. Greene was responsible for the Student Life programs such as New Student Orientation, the Student Leadership and Involvement Center, student clubs, and campus-wide affinity programs. Mr. Greene chaired the Student Appeals Committee, which reviews both academic and Student Code of Conduct violations. Additionally, he conducted Title IX training and information sessions for new students during New Student Orientation. He worked closely with the Student Government Association to strengthen their voices as student advocates and leaders of the College. Most importantly, he worked to strengthen and build relationships across the campus and in the community.

While at the UMKC, he provided leadership, strategic direction, and fiscal oversight for a broad range of student affairs programs in the areas of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs, Activity and Program Council, Student Organization Administration, Commuter Student Programs, the Institute for Leadership and Service, and the LGBTQ Resource Center. During his tenure, he led the process that developed the mission, goals, and outcomes for Student Life and increased student engagement and involvement across all areas.

As both a scholar and a practitioner, Mr. Greene believes in the importance of staying current with research and applying student development theory when framing programs, policies, and practices. he ensures needs assessments and evaluations guide program development and student learning. Mr. Greene believes in building lasting partnerships between academic and student affairs, to foster student learning across the campus and in the community. It is through these practices that student retention and success are fully realized.

When supervising and mentoring staff, Mr. Greene provides and creates opportunities for professional and personal growth. He believes teams are most successful when there is a balance between autonomy and accountability. While he prefers consensus decision-making and collaboration through collegiality, he acts decisively when the situation warrants. He prides himself on the fact that staff can rely on his integrity, support, and advocacy on their behalf. Additionally, students can affirm that he strives to ensure their voices are part of the decision-making process whenever possible and appropriate.

Mr. Greene has had the privilege to work both inside and outside of higher education and uses his experience and education to provide a global view of academia. This has given him a different perspective of the artificial boundaries often place between academic and student affairs. Similarly, his experiences have taught him that administrative affairs including human resources, business services, and information technologies can be invaluable partners that need a seat at the table to ensure institutional success. He teaches staff that institutional divisions should not limit them to specific roles and responsibilities but rather encourage them to better understand the impact everyone has on retention and student success.

Mr. Greene is an active member of the campus community who works to develop partnerships across the campus and actively fosters student learning. He is passionate about social justice and strives to work in a campus community that is committed to redistributing power and privilege more equitably among all individuals regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, and ability, and that incorporates multiple perspectives in its core. Evidence shows that doing so improves the learning experience for all, enhances student and employee retention, and strengthens the overall quality of the institution. As a practitioner, he understands the role we play as change agents; as an educator, he understands how important it is to empower students and staff to become agents of change. Throughout his career, he has had the opportunity to reflect on power, privilege, and agency as it relates to his work.

As a first-generation college student, Mr. Greene believes in the importance of an educational environment that engages faculty and staff who support our students and has been actively involved in creating and championing programs and activities that support the growth and development of individuals. He engages campus partners, has been a key member of Academic and Student Success leadership teams, and has worked to create an inclusive and diverse community for students. Mr. Greene strives to foster a workplace climate that is supportive of employees and respectful of differences, and a learning environment that challenges students, faculty, and staff to be self-reflective and committed to their personal development and the development of those around them.

Upon completion of the Doctorate of Education in Urban Leadership and Policy Studies in Education, Mr. Greene plans to continue the work of supporting student access,

retention, and completion. In time, Mr. Greene plans to teach at the post-secondary level while continuing his administration role.